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POLLY.

CHAPTER I.

CUMBERLEY VILLAGE.

FROM the old official London high road, along which the coaches used to roll, turned off a pleasant "green lane,"—cool, shady, and winding—inviting as a bower to the heated and dusty passengers. A mile or more down this "green lane,"—it seemed, indeed, almost a scrap of a park,—came the inn, retired back, with a tiny lawn in front, and a handsome, noble tree doing gracious duty as the holder of a sign, which creaked high among its steady branches. A little further on was passed a small house of as old a date, rusty in its bricks and slates, with a small road-side garden before it, and a green wooden gate which flapped noisily when any one entered. This was the house where the Reverend Mr. Churchill, Vicar of Cumberley, lived, with his daughter Polly, and "no end," it was said, of small children. Then the road wound on again, pretty

much after the shape of the letter S, and was all trees on both sides for a few roods, until it opened into a cheerful, rather scattered little street of cottages and houses, which the visitor might be about three minutes walking through, and had then left Cumberley behind. A pleasant, fragrant, pastoral spot—an English corner of which there are many patterns. Rich and comforting to the eye; cool and shady of a sultry day; pleasant to the palate—for the best cream, butter, and meat were as yet not whirled away to the next great town—and economical to the pocket, which was one of the reasons why it suited the Rev. Mr. Churchill. But there are ogres who prey on these fair morsels as the fairy tale giants did upon tender virgins. The railway station was some twenty minutes' walk off; but it made little difference, as the train stopped but seldom. But a building contractor had come there by accident, and seen its capabilities. When he had "scraped" together a little more money, and sold his last "block of houses," he would buy the ground bit by bit. Then would the earth open in huge pits of red and umber clay; then would the rich deep green fields be cut up in roads and paths and trenches—the thick hedges lopped away and scarified—the noble trees rudely cut down and strewn about; their stumps left gaunt and bare, as though they had been guillotined. Then would rise the steam from mountains of slaked lime, and at every side, and at every angle, down the slope, and facing the slope, would mount broken rows of raw yellow villas—clean, dusty, and staring. How many pleasant meads and pleasant retreats have been thus cruelly sacked, laid

waste, scored with bleeding wounds, and, it is hardly too fanciful to add, then patched over with strips of this staring yellow diaculum! Charming walks unthought-of for years, changed hideously, make us rub our eyes. Sweet nooks, umbrageous bits of Watteau, having but a few days' or weeks' reprieve, are more piteous spectacles still; for the contractors' planks and carts are about, but he has not yet begun. How will it end? shall we be all town one day? Cumberley has some two or three years' grace; but the contractor keeps it "in his eye," and will deal with the lord of the soil, much to his surprise, by-and-by.

The station was on the old high road, exactly where the stage used to stop to pick up the stray passenger waiting there in the road, with his trunks about him. The railway led in one direction to the invigorating watering-place of Washington-on-the-Sea, just fifteen miles off; and in the other, to Irnston (a corruption of Ironstown), a great manufacturing city. All railways lead to London, as all roads do to Rome. The cure of Cumberley was in the diocese of Bishop Brindley, but Cumberley itself ran a little into the next diocese of Dunmore, where Bishop Talboys reigned. The great man was Squire Godfrey, whose gate opened in the village. The general elements were the doctor, Dissenting minister, and clergyman. And to Cumberley came a few "bagmen;" a fishing-man now and then; and a stray pedestrian or two. The bagmen said it was "a deadly lively hole," and at the back of the well-known "God speed." The fisherman lingered a day or so more

than he had intended, he found it so soft and balmy, so richly green to the eye. The pedestrian walking wearily in after his day's march, passed the little vicarage, and saw in the open window, framed in abundance of honeysuckle, a charming face, a small head bent over needle-work. And the head was raised on hearing the passing steps; the evening sun flashed on soft light brown hair, and delicately-coloured cheeks, and the softest inquiring eyes.

As he went on, he would most likely be passed by a tall hard-looking clergyman, with an air of business, posting home; and for whom the coloured face was looking out anxiously. For the tea was made, and the hot toast done, and kept at an equable temperature inside the fender.

A curious little community, as the pedestrian—a young Oxford gentleman—sitting in the inn—the “Speed the Plough”—and talking to the landlady, Mrs. Holden, a lady as good as any parish register, soon learned. She saw a good many of these gentlemanly young travellers, and fishermen, and liked talking to them. She told them of Mr. Churchill, and his daughter, Polly. And how the clergyman was infinitely disliked, as “too set up;” and too busy pushing himself, and writing letters, to mind his duties. Why, there was Mr. Bush the ‘senting minister, doing more work in a day than the “regular” in a month.

Who had built that little chapel, at the other end of the village, which the traveller had indeed remarked. It was no bigger than a small watch-house; and built in the

usual objectionable style of architecture. Such edifices do, indeed, a little remind us of the Professors who direct them, and harmonise exactly, being short, stout, round and staring. Mr. Churchill quite contemned this intruder, who wore a very worn broad-brimmed hat, and a coil of linen swathed about his neck, and was very active in what he called "stirrin' up" the parish. There were old people there, who despondingly recalled the old respectable days when such a creature would not be "stood" a moment. He was, indeed, the forerunner of the sacrilegious contractor. Though, indeed, had there been another pattern of man from the Rev. Mr. Churchill, one less "in the air, and less busy with himself," thinking more of the precious souls under him, than of letter-writing, and bowing and "scraping to bishops," it had been different. He was unpopular, simply because he had no thought of those he was with, and despised the little community thoroughly. Strange to say, he was all but unconscious of Mr. Bush, or the alarming progress his "low" doctrines were making. His eyes were far beyond the parish, settled on bright particular stars, Deans, Archdeacons, and Bishops. "He was thrown away in Cumberley." Indeed he had no business there, Mrs. Holden said; having been imported across the whole breadth of England. His father had been Churchill "the M.P.;" a man who had spent all his life "begging the Government" for the vacancy at Athens, at Spezia, at Florence even—for this secretaryship and that commissionership; asking always for the varied and opposite round of duties. He never got

anything; and such never do receive anything. And just at the end of his term, when the constituency was turning him out in disgust, and he was almost at the minister's knees, imploring piteously for something to put bread in his mouth, the secretary recollected that he had heard Brindley, one of the stanch party Bishops, mention at dinner only last night that he had no less than five-and-twenty letters about a little living down at Cumberley.

The secretary wrote the twenty-sixth to "my dear lord," in a very confidential strain, about "a poor devil of ours, whom they are going to cut adrift." And the Bishop was only too glad to oblige in any way the noble lord at the head of the Treasury. It was worth a little over a hundred a-year: and it was given to Churchill's son, the present incumbent. Thus the love of intrigue was in his veins, as it were. He knew he was "cut out" for nobler things, and a larger sphere; and for over fifteen years now he had been "straining every nerve" to rise in the world, and obtain a more influential station.

When the Grand West of England Railway, which affected a kind of ducal state in all its dealings and management, having wider lines, more splendid stations, more sumptuous carriages—and less dividends—than any other, was "coming down" by the Scour Valley, from pure arrogance and ambition, and making a cross line, which was to "tap" the parvenu Southerly Junction, who were taking airs, their works came by Cumberley, just a quarter of a mile outside the village. The

fishermen and the pedestrians, how they lamented this cruel profanation! The gleaming river Cum, which wound like molten silver between the richest of banks, was now to be turned into a puddle; invaded by an army of roughs, and spanned by a daring viaduct of so many arches. The Grand Westerley had no thought of Cumberley in the matter, and disdained to think even of a station there, striding contemptuously past it, and trampling across its lovely river and valley in great red brick boots. After this the villa contractors would not be slow in coming. The transformation of Cumberley into a plaster town, with terraces, &c., would be then not far off. Sir Charles Tinny, the great contractor, had bought much of the land about, with this view, and was only waiting for the railway. Meanwhile, the hamlet displayed all its inviting charms, and seemed to woo the stranger into its inspiriting sun and cool shade, unconscious of the cruel destiny so close at hand. So do we see kids or frolicsome lambs gambol on before the butcher into the shambles.





CHAPTER II.

NEWY VALE.

HAD Mr. Churchill been asked by any inquirer for a geographical description of the country, he would have at once proceeded to explain that Cumberley was merely a perpetual curacy of the most wretched sort—"a discredit to any country calling itself Christian;" but that lying next to Cumberley was an over-grown, over-paid parish, which had been handed over to "that man Henley." With "these shameful inequalities," he would ask, "how can you wonder if all the low Dissenters in the country are not calling out and pointing? Was it any wonder that the Dissenting fellows were getting bolder and more forward every day?" There was no doubt of this fact, as Mr. Churchill knew; but it was not from irreverence growing out of the inequality to which he alluded. The truth was there was no call for reform or adjustment, in the case of Cumberley and the next parish, the emoluments of both being nearly in proportion to their size. But the "adjustment"

which he called for, was his own appointment to the lucrative parish, when the inequality would have at once ceased, and the Dissenters have become the most unreasonable and greedy of beings, as they always were in other respects.

The incumbent of the over-grown parish was "that fellow Henley," who had been "put in by Brindley, the Bishop;" all to "lickspittle" that Lord, of whom he was a connexion. Doctor Henley was an elderly man, very tall, large, and florid, who in his youth had been a "remarkably fine-looking man;" but who now, though he walked firm and grenadier-like, found his fine proportions rather a burden as age came on. He had very red lips, and very red cheeks; wore large spectacles, which he was always touching and adjusting, as though they were lazy or unwilling servants, and required prompting to do their duty. He spoke in a richly fluent style, with a kind of "smacking" and relish about his lips, which came of talking fast, while he enjoyed his dinner, sauces, &c. Altogether his was a very well-known figure in the parish, as it was seen striding or stalking along the roads, with a broad-leaf hat on; present hint of the larger and more correct "casquet" which was to be fitted to his head one of these mornings: for it was known that he had Lord Formanton's great interest.

We should have heard Mr. Churchill, who had a feeling almost akin to animosity towards this clergyman, on the disgrace to the Church "in this wholesale jobbing away" its sacred emoluments. He would have preached

on the scandal, illustrating it with an instance very near home, could there have been any encouragement for it, by way of precedent.

"The man" had been tutor at Formanton. That nobleman having strong political connexions by marriage, &c., and having himself held office, he had only "to ask Brindley, who would just kiss the rug before anything in the shape of a lord." This tutorship, if not a product of Mr. Churchill's morbid brain, must have been a service of many years back; and may have been within Mr. Churchill's knowledge exclusively. But he was never weary of repeating it. He regarded the clergyman with an animosity of which the latter was quite unconscious, through an idea that but for his intrusion he himself would have been the happy incumbent of Newey Vale.

The two parishes were so close that the inhabitants mixed together very freely, coming over for market days, &c. : but the Rev. Dr. Henley came over very often indeed, striding up the street with his round head in the air, and his quaker hat very far back, and a thick red Malacca cane flourishing and keeping harmonious measure with his long strides. He returned salutations and "Good-mornings," without checking his pace or turning his head, with a short "How d'e do? how d'e do?" or a patronising "Good-morning, my friend." He often said he looked on Cumberley as part of his parish—a speech which inflamed Mr. Churchill to fury. But he did not take these little walks to look after this part of his cure, but to pay visits up at the Hall. He was

always there visiting or dining. "You met decent people there," he said ; "you breathed the fresh air of civilisation, and got clear of the rustics for a time. After all, in the country we do get behind prodigiously, and lose our little polish. Don't we now? Eh, Miss Godfrey? So we do—so we do. Rustic and rusty, I say, have the same root. Ha ! ha !"

The vicar of Newey Vale, or Valley, lived in a handsome house in that parish, with green-houses, lawn, and gardens. There lived also Mrs. Henley, a lady of stout figure ; which indeed should not be alluded to save in the way of commiseration, as being one of the inconveniences, in the present order of things, dealt out to rich and poor alike. But it will have been remarked that there is a vulgar as well as an aristocratic shape of this affliction—the former unhappily being of a coarse and outrageous character, utterly unwieldly and unmanageable ; while the latter, more gentle and refined, accepts control, and can be tempered by many arts and graces. The truth was, she had become attached to Dr. Henley's fortunes in the pre-Formanton days—a fact which that gentleman often frankly lamented, even in her presence. "The fact is, I ought to have been at the top of the tree long ago—long ago. When I was at Formanton, I might have looked about and chosen for myself. He is the kindest ferlow (*sic*) in the world. Would do anything for me. At home, you know, they were always preaching to me 'Marry early,' and all that. A great mistake, Sir." In justice to the doctor, it must be said that this view made no difference in his treatment of his

stout lady (whom Mr. Churchill slandered, by tracing her origin to a saddler's shop in Bury St. Edmunds), and who herself grew to accept her share in impeding her husband's fortunes as a thing to be lamented over. But, however, it was quite understood, as a matter of course, that she never went out to parties with the doctor—understanding perfectly that she was not exactly suited, you see, for that sort of thing.

He had a very handsome daughter, and a good-looking son in the army, Formanton Henley, so called after the noble person in whose family — ahem! — rather with whose family his father was so intimately connected in ties of friendship. There was also a little boy named Algernon, of about nine years old, not yet sent to school, but who in due time was to go to Eton and “make nice friends there” of young lords and young baronets. He was a very curious lad, with a small sharp white face and small black eyes, and with a very thoughtful shrewd manner and a courteous way of answering, which elicited constant approbation from his father. “Very good, very good, Sir,” he would say. “That’s right, Algey. That young man will get on. Eh, Sir?”

The daughter Isabella — so called after “charming Lady Formanton,” was really a striking-looking girl, with plenty of good black hair and a fine colour in her cheeks — clear white and rich pink — with a good figure: but connoisseurs looking into the future saw how these charms would in course of time develop into the coarser elements which distinguished her father. She was besides a dull girl, and could do little more than look pretty.

For a short time the doctor had had a chaplaincy at Yarmouth, where a few fashionable citizens came in the season, and where a regiment or two had been quartered. There the young lady had been elected the belle of the place, and in the dearth of ladies and of beauty, set abroad a *furor* beyond what even her natural charms were entitled to excite. Captain Mungo and Mr. Potts, Major Magenis, of the Carrickfergus Militia—then quartered there—were objects of her favours, within, of course, the limits of honourable flirtation. Doctor Henley called on everybody, talked with them unctuously, and was asked to dine a great deal. Major Magenis had soon to resign his commission—for, “half broke” before, the pic-nics and balls he set on foot to entertain Miss Christina Henley completely destroyed his fortunes. Then the regiments were ordered away. Others came in their place, for the “soldier’s young lady” has very much the great Napoleon’s view of an army—one red man being much the same as another—so long as he filled the ranks. But a worse change was when the Formanton interest brought “papa an odious living” in a dreary pastoral neighbourhood—nothing but green fields and good air, without a patch of scarlet to light up the landscape. An almost serious difference had taken place between father and daughter on the subject of this change. But the doctor, though much pressed, could not forego such an opening, which, after all, as he said, complacently, would be a “steppingstone to something more suitable;” and Miss Christina had only the consolation of waiting patiently in the middle of the

ecclesiastical brook of promotion, with perpetual recurrence to "that dear Yarmouth," which was now lost to her. Cumberley was, indeed, but a poor hunting country, in her sense. As for Mr. Burgess, "that workman," as she called him, she would not look at him. Mr. Burgess was the assistant engineer of the new viaduct, at which they were now busily at work, and therefore one of the leading figures of Cumberley.





CHAPTER III.

THE ENGINEER.

WHEN the Cumberley Viaduct was starting, and the navvies, horses, mud-stained waggons, pile-driving engines — looking like giraffes — were gathering, a young engineer had come down with the rest, and was staying at the “Speed the Plough.” He was son to one of the contractors—of Burgess and Young—husband—and was called Harry Burgess. A strongly-built, athletic, good-looking fellow, nearly handsome, without beard or moustache, but honest whiskers : you should have heard Mrs. Holden on his manly “English” cleanliness—no “foreignneering” tricks about him. And there was perfect truth in this ; for he had an off-hand, straightforward manner—acquired perhaps from his dealings—with a sense of justice and manly honour, which made him popular. He had a sensitiveness, however, which gave him a shy manner, the origin of which no one suspected, but which came from a perpetual sense that those he liked and loved might think the worse of him because

of his humble origin. Not but that he felt pride in his father's rise : but once when he was at a school where gentlemen's sons were taken, a young aristocrat, in some quarrel, had said, "You low navvy's son, you !" as young gentlemen, when at a loss for weapons of offence, will seize on what they think will most annoy. This insult had affected him more than it should have done : and it was curious that, for many years after, he had always seemed to himself under some disability, as it were, and nervously shrank away from the chance or opportunity of such things being said. Not, as just mentioned, that he felt anything but a proper pride and respect for his calling, and those brave virtues of industry and even genius that had raised his father. But it had been once used as a reproach ; and he was never secure but that, if he made any advance in society, some such feeling might not be in the hearts of those whom he met, or perhaps interfered. This among the ladies and gentlemen of his own degree, or a little above him, gave him a restraint and reserve, and even gentleness of manner.

During the first fortnight or so of his stay at Cumberley, he had met very often a young girl of "a very elegant person"—as the old writers put it—either entering or going out of the village. He was struck by the charm of her dress, the piquancy of her face, the delicate tint of the colouring in her cheeks, and the brightness of her eyes. There was a physiognomy attractive to him even in her dress and walk ; coming home tired one evening, he had seen her pass by from the window of the "Speed the Plough," and then thought of asking

Mrs. Holden about her. That lady, then being busy, gave him only a few scanty details ; but at tea, when she had more leisure, she entered more into the subject. Her warmth gave her almost biographical power. As was natural, and as often happens, what he heard he seemed to have known before. It was almost what he had been filling in for himself. The landlady dwelt more on the shortcomings of the father, and thus indirectly and more effectually, magnified the daughter. It was a sin and shame to have a parson of this sort in the place. He no more belonged to it or thought of it than if he was up in London. The greatest schemer that ever walked. For all *he* cared, not one of them might have a soul to be saved. He let everything go its own road, while he wasted his time writing fiddle-de-dee begging letters to bishops and baronets ; while that poor young thing at home scraped and slaved, and wore her little heart out, trying to keep things together : patching this, mending that, slaving her pretty eyes out of her head. How she kept that colour in her cheeks was a mystery, unless (Mrs. Holden added this high compliment) she took pains to keep up her own little health just for the sake of looking after all them children. Only for her, what would become of them, or of him ?

This was a pretty little sketch for one night, and the Engineer saw it now and again before him among the engines, pile-drivers, and the dark cylinders next day. Mrs. Holden was always glad to talk. She came back to the subject soon, perhaps, on invitation ; dwelling again on the Reverend Mr. Churchill.

“And after all, Mr. Burgess, now with such a warm-hearted creature as that in the house with him every day, he is the same hard, cold stick of a man he ever was. No blood in him ; not a drop, I believe, Sir. Dry as any chip ; and dry and hard to her. Takes it all as a matter of course, and,” added Mrs. Holden, with some acuteness, “thinks in his heart *he* is doing it all. He might be Secretary of State, and carrying the nation on his back. I assure you, Sir, I have laughed to see him passing by that window, his white chin in the air, and as much starch in his cheeks as in his tie, with his bundle of begging letters in his hand going to the post. And that man, Mr. Burgess,—I know all about him, for I took the trouble to make it out,—found a soft woman to marry him ; a poor, faithful, gentle creature, that I do believe he froze out of the world. She was very like, I am told, to Miss Polly there. She could not stay here. There was no heart, no sympathy, and she wanted those things. She was worn down with all those children ; no help or cheering from any one. He wrote his begging letters the day of the funeral, just the same, and sent them out to be posted. That I learn, Sir, from Bridget Clithero, a hard-working woman he was lucky enough to get hold of ; for he has luck and love too ; and I believe that Miss Polly would give her life for his, any hour. As, indeed, she would have done to save her dear mother, who was little more than a girl, and all but froze out of the world. I have the whole thing about that from Bridget Clithero too. She has told it to me many a time. The poor dying girl crying at leaving him, though he was down

stairs writing his begging letters. I suppose now that all that was on her mind was, what was to become of him when she was gone. There would be no one then to take care of him. And both Miss Polly and Bridget Clithero both promised her there on their knees they would always take care of him, and humour and let him have his little whims. "For," says she, "he is a good darling, Polly, as I know, and means the best for us all, though you do not see it. And he has been very kind to me in his own way; and indeed, I like him, and my heart is broken at leaving him, and indeed you will promise me;" and so they did; and that very night she died. And of course, as Bridget Clithero says, he did show something at that scene, and I suppose put his begging letters out of his head then; but poor Miss Polly, though she was no more than a child then, went off into a swoon, and lay that way for hours, and when she was got back, went off again. Her mother and she were sisters, and talked and hung about each other like sisters. And so it was a blow; and from that day to this she has kept to what she promised, and I believe the love her mother had for him has passed into her heart. And so he gains by it; and I believe she does worship the ground he walks on. She has her picture there in her room, and talks and prays before it, I believe Bridget Clithero says. A sweet girl, Mr. Burgess, Sir, and thrown away on him, I need not tell you."

This was something more of a picture, and all this also Mr. Burgess seemed to have known before. He had a strange interest in her now; and next day again saw the

soft face, and her graceful figure borne swooning from her mother's side, among his heavy, hard iron engines. In such a little place an acquaintance came, as of course; the Reverend Mr. Churchill, scenting in him some shape of channel for postal delivery, called on him as vicar of the place. Mr. Burgess called on *him*. (Mr. Bush, the rival interest, had also called, but found no sympathy.) He soon saw Polly, and soon came to know her well. There was a sympathy between them almost at once; and indeed young Burgess insensibly found an introduction to her heart by speaking of her father, and though not of an artful nature, could not help very often dwelling on that subject.





CHAPTER IV.

POLLY'S HOUSEHOLD.

SOME summer morning, when the sun is well up in the front of the vicar's house, and lighting up his—or rather Polly's—honeysuckles—so thick and rich that it seemed as though a hole had been cut among them for a window—we may have a glimpse of Mr. Churchill's household, about a quarter of an hour after he had himself come out to the door to take in the letters impatiently from the postman. He was discontented at being kept waiting. "I hope you don't lounge and gossip on the road, instead of minding your business. If there's much more of this, I'll write to the Secretary about it." He then withdrew into his study, to feast on his despatches. This was always the happy moment in his day: for it was excitement. Not so for Polly, above in a sort of general workshop, to whom it was a moment of flutter and anxiety; for she deeply dreaded the daily measure of disappointment which that hour must regularly bring. From a sort of instinct, she

called "hush" to the noisy children. "Now, dears, do be quiet, and don't disturb dear papa. He is busy now." And for an hour or so she never ventured to go down.

"Come down here, Polly," was called out sharply, "and do leave those plagues a moment. I want you."

This was cried out up a twisted little stair, like the companion-ladder of a fair-sized brig. Indeed the house was so small, that conversation could be carried on between kitchen and attic, bed-room and drawing-room, with little exertion. And in that doll's house, which an ingenious builder could have readily fitted with a front that would open on hinges, were put away four children, a strong girl, who was cook, valet, maid of all work, and of all conceivable works, Miss Polly herself, and the reverend head of the house. Polly was indeed chief officer. Bridget was slow-moving, and had not the versatility for so many various functions. Nor had she earnest enthusiasm born of filial love and duty, which was Polly's secret for getting through so much. At the unlucky moment that Mr. Churchill was calling, a tumult had broken out. In some "*rix*e" a piece of furniture with its attendant delft had been dragged down on Tom or Jack, but for the interference of the nursery Providence that takes care of mischievous boys and drunken men in common. Polly had to fly from her work and intervene in the storm of crying, howling, &c., and then had the task of setting herself free, for they were all tightly wound about her—(one was holding some of the fragments up to her as he roared)—and this might have been a pretty reproduction of the Laocoon.

Her reverend father was in a very petulant humour. "Of course, you don't mind *anything* I say. You choose to be the slave of those children, but I might be calling here till I was sick. What have they smashed now? You don't know how to keep them in order, or won't take the trouble. If I was a dean or a fat bishop like that pampered Brindley there, it would be a different story. I'm worried out of my life—I declare I am." He had surely not the air of being persecuted, for he had the air of clean and substantial health—of which he always took good care—taking his daily walk towards evening, *by himself*, for he looked on walking with his daughter as so much time wasted; and it prevented his having interviews and long conversations with his bishops and patrons. He had a long stiff face, which seemed as if it had been cast. It was firm and prim, and well shaved, and, it must be said, hard, and there was no colour in it; though he had his half-bottle of excellent Beaune wine every day, always kept in stock, and of the best quality, for his dear health, by Polly's provident care. Everything, in all their wants and pressure of little debts, gave way to *that*.

"Dearest," said Polly, "I came down as fast as I could. Tommy was in some trouble, but they are all quiet now, and you won't hear them any more. What is it, dear?"

"Always the way," he said, sourly. "Another man's children would be at school, and kept from persecuting him. I can't do that, of course, and must only put up with it. Well, they'll take care of them at the workhouse

by-and-by. We'll all be there in good time, never fear."

Polly's eyes wandered to the table, and saw the explanation of this gloomy allusion in some half-dozen open letters and the newspaper in his hand. These telling their own story, a story, indeed, told several times in the week, she answered them rather than her father. It was quite certain the post had brought evil tidings to-day. Her gentle heart glowed with sympathy and trouble. "Dearest," she said, "don't mind this. Don't, now. You are so clever, and know so much, you will find some other opening before the day is over." She was too delicate to ask what the particular failure was, or she would have suggested something. But what she had said was no compliment, for she believed him to be full of genius and tact, and to have the head of the Secretary of State. Of course, in her rustic way, she thought *that* was the extreme perfection of genius and ability.

"Will there?" said the clergyman angrily, "something turn up? And when, pray? Be good enough to tell me; you know better, of course. And where, Ma'am, am I to unearth another bishop? They don't grow on the bushes every day. Have I the time and money to do it? Have I not scraped the very skin off my knees, toadying them all round? and this is the way I'm treated! The humbugging oily son of a Puritan—*he* set up for the good of the Church, indeed! It would be good for the Church if he were packed out of it, and better men put in his place. What airs he takes! but I'll expose him; I will."

Again Polly perfectly understood, and sighed with a sort of agony. She knew the story—the old story. The bishop was, of course, her bishop—their Bishop Brindley. As every living became vacant, an application was forwarded in due course. In the intervals Doctor Brindley's interest was kept alive by periodical letters of complaint, and on the most ingenious pretexts. Polly could only say what was her old formula, "Don't mind, dearest, keep up. Something else will come."

"That's easy to say. You're a fine wise woman," he said; "*you* know the world, don't you? and better than your father, of course. Nice apostle he is—a father in God, indeed, too. It's a scandal to have such fellows put up in such places." Polly, in sore grief, and half mechanically, or, indeed, more to find some other topic of comfort, went to the table, and took up one of the opened letters. Her father was walking about fuming and muttering. What she read was :—

"PALACE.

"REV. SIR,—In reply to your letter, I am directed by the Lord Bishop to inform you that he has so many legitimate claims upon his patronage, that it will be quite impossible for him to comply with your wishes in reference to the living of Crumpley.

"I am also directed by his Lordship to request that you will, as far as possible, avoid troubling him with correspondence.

"In reference to the duties or difficulties of your parish, his Lordship will always be happy to hear from

you ; but puts it to your own good sense whether it is worth while wasting your time, and occupying his Lordship's heavily engaged attention, with repeated importunities, which cannot be of the slightest use : as his Lordship will always be guided in that direction by the one strict principle of selection, from which no considerations from without shall make him swerve.

"You must not take it ill, therefore, if any communications of the kind to which his Lordship refers, be left unacknowledged. In the event of any vacancy, you may depend on his Lordship immediately considering the claims and fitness of all in his diocese.

"Believe me,

"Rev. Sir,

"Sincerely yours,

"ALFRED KNOX."

Polly's cheeks tingled at this humiliation ; every word of it was addressed to her. She was not one of the cold, gently invisibly-suffering natures. "This is very uncalled for," she said ; "he shouldn't have written such a thing. I am sure they all write. Some one has been putting him against you, dearest," she said, going up to him.

"I know there has, and I could name the fellow. He talks of his conscience and duty, and legitimate claims ; why, there is not a greater jobber in the establishment. I have a good mind just to sit down and write a stinging pamphlet, and expose the way things are carried on in this diocese."

"I wouldn't let it affect you a moment," Polly said, with the sweetest interest. "It's most unjust and unfair. Only let us think, and we'll hit on something else. There's nothing like trying, and trying again. Now, let us see," she said, drawing a chair in, and taking up a pen. "There is Lord Leighton, you have not pressed him half enough, dearest, have you?"

The tall clergyman lifted himself out of his chair, and going over to the fire,—the only one in the house besides the kitchen fire,—plunged his hands deep into his pockets, and ruefully placed one of his feet on the hob.

"No use. He wrote me one of his stiff impudent letters; infernal stiff and impudent. Best let it alone, now. You see you know nothing about it. You haven't a head for this sort of thing. Why, other girls with half your opportunities would have picked up something brilliant, and done something for her family. Even that fellow, Smith—a man that I saw selling pills, though he calls himself a doctor—now, his girl has picked up a man with an estate and a good five thousand a year. It's enough to break one's heart."

Perhaps he then fancied he saw in Polly's face a hint or suggestion about young Burgess. And with a strange inconsistency, he took another turn.

"It is very fine for you philandering about with any young Jack that comes into the place. All you care about is to be out of the harness, and leave the unfortunate pack-horse here, that has had all the trouble of rearing you, to face the whole world, and put food into

the mouths of those squalid creatures up stairs. But I'll not do it any more ; I'll go away first ; I'd sooner be a soldier—anything."

Not at all affected by this notion, highly comic as it was, of the starched clergyman running away to enlist, Polly again took up some of the letters on the table. There was one that gave Polly a chill ; and signed, "JOHN NATHAN."

John Nathan was a "friendly loan society," who lent money in small sums, to "clerical gentlemen and others, on their own security"—with, of course, the strictest secrecy to be relied on.

Polly, with some misgivings and protests, had personally negotiated this little business, it was only thirty pounds, but she had been imperatively ordered to take her pen. Her natural tact brought it to an end with success. And it is more than likely that the rev. gentleman from his circumstances and taste for protocoling would have failed. It was like a bit of comedy to see Polly writing in a manly downright style ; her delicate fingers in a strange contrast to the business language they were inditing. There was the usual train of consequences—the thirty pounds became over sixty pounds in a few months, and the time was drawing on when Mephistopheles would come in his scarlet and cock's feathers, and demand payment. Polly was outside all these now familiar shapes of persecution ; though of nights, up in her little cot, with brothers and sisters about her, she had many shapeless misgivings. But she now called up a cheerful face.

"Oh ! Nathan again—our friend," she said. "I must write to him at once ; he is very good-humoured."

"Ah ! there's another nice mess you brought me into. Such a persecution !"

"Now, don't fret your poor head about that," said Polly. "Leave Nathan to me, as I brought you into it. He's an admirer of mine, I am sure."

"Absurdity. Well, mind, you've taken that on yourself, as indeed you ought, as I was dragged into it ; mind that, now. I never asked you."

"How I am worried ! There's Plummer they've jobbed into Woking ! Nice shepherd he'll make ! As sure as there's a Providence, Brindley made him pay a commission. He's as greedy on it as a shark. It's disgusting, so it is." And he kept looking moodily at the fire, for a few moments. Then he broke out more cheerfully. "I tell you what ; I'll have my satisfaction, at all events. I'll write to that stuck-up Brindley, and make him wince under his apron. You remember the letter I wrote that fellow Francis, who jobbed me out of Saxen-hurst, and having it, I may say, under his hand. It stabbed him, as I have reason to know."

And with great good humour the Rev. Mr. Churchill turned to his desk, drew in his chair, and got his pens and paper to begin the letter that was to have such an effect. He was already unconscious of Polly—was smiling and feeling his throat. Numberless schemes were pouring in upon his brain. Say a letter of firm remonstrance "to Brindley," not so cutting as he had first intended, calm and dignified :—"MY LORD, I con-

fess I was wholly unprepared for the letter I had the honour of receiving through your Lordship's chaplain this morning. It pained and grieved me that your Lordship should think, &c." He would take that tone. He knew human nature. The Bishop read his own letters ; and he heard him saying "Knox, after all there is a dignity and good humour about Churchill. I am afraid you wrote too strongly to him. Remind me about him next time, &c." Polly, trained and skilled in reading his face, saw he was already wrapt into the seventh palace—his heaven—and communing with the blessed—his blessed—who dwelt in those places. Polly saw this with pleasure, and with soft steps stole away up stairs, to where she was now wanted.





CHAPTER V.

“TOMMY.”

ALREADY another *émeute* had broken out. Bridget, made impatient with troubles of her own, and harassed with various and distracting duties, could not be everywhere. Billy was a fresh-faced boy, freckled and tanned and almost red-haired; in tremendous health, and therefore always prompted to mischief. He was the despot of the nursery; the others were helplessly servile to him, and allowed themselves to be turned into little horses and mares for his amusement. They were required to gallop, and even kick up, like the animals they imitated. But the driver turning a corner had hit his head against a chest of drawers, and was dealing in a very tyrannical manner with his team, singling out the little Lizzie—barely a yearling—a gentle uncomplaining creature, very like her mother, whom he was now punishing.

Polly was just in time. She loved the little patient from her memory. Lizzie was the one their dying mother

had last called for and held to her heart. There was something sacred in this last touch. Polly could be firm and prompt. Billy was afraid of her, and she could assume an awful severity.

The gentle police officer addressed herself promptly, yet not unkindly, to her duty. The ringleader, Billy, had indeed betrayed himself by his pink, heated face, and though the strongest of the crowd, was crying bitterly and denouncing his companions. She took him away, and drew out from under the heap the youngest and weakest, who, strange to say, had taken its treatment without complaint, and restored order in the shortest time conceivable. All her exertions were to prevent noise, and it would seem as though punishment was to be condoned, save in the instance of Billy, a notorious and irreclaimable mutineer, and with whom Polly felt she *must* deal severely for his own sake. A mere hint to Bridget, the "Calcraft" of the house, and the "rope would be adjusted, the bolt drawn," or at least what amounted in his eyes to those dreadful motions, would have taken place. But from the gentle-hearted Secretary of State a reprieve was sure to arrive at the last moment.

Polly was now in her room, and having performed these official duties, had now to think of another task—of Mr. Nathan, and other persons who had claims, and with a weary heart wrote, not without skill, to that professional gentleman the usual request "for time." This "putting off" fell into the round of her daily life, and it must be said only extended to her father's personal debts and

liabilities. Their credit in the village, owing to her ceaseless pains and scrapings, was in a thriving condition ; so thriving that her father assumed that there were *no expenses*, and gave her no credit for this success. This task done, there were duties in the village ; washing a pair of socks or gloves for the healthy delinquent, Billy ; something "nice" for her papa's dinner, and to put him in good humour after all his trials. Of course the snipe which she produced would be taken with a lecture on extravagance. "One would think I had a thousand a year, or a fortune like Brindley's !" Polly was only too happy to accept this scolding penitentially, so that she saw him enjoying it with *gout*. Then she began a note to young Burgess ; tore it up, and got her bonnet.

The parish were a good deal puzzled by what was going on in that direction. They could get at nothing tangible, and were sorely aggrieved. Indeed, on this account, Polly seemed to have lost ground with the Mrs. Grundys and Mrs. Candours of the place. Her sense of duty was a little intolerable to them, and perhaps a reproach. They considered her a good, bright, "motherly" girl ; of course a treasure to her father. "What would he do without her ?" was repeated a hundred times, but *without* a particle of romance in her whole composition, and indeed without *much* sense of feeling, which is common enough in the case of these housewife minds, as they may be called.

With this large family under Polly's charge, who for intelligence and reason were about on a level with so many sea anemones or jelly fishes, there was one child

who stood out from the rest very conspicuously. This was Tommy, a round-faced and pink-faced boy of about eight years old, who was always seen in green frock and glazed leather belt and buckle. He was Polly's friend, who could appeal to his reason and indulgence, and his rude, rosy cheeks and sweet projecting lips—for he was a perfect "Mulready boy"—were often saluted with many a gentle kiss of hers. As often too was his father's face, lifted from his desk, turned to him with a reflective expression of dislike and disgust. For the clergyman could not endure his rude health, and his rosy cheeks, and what he called "his ploughmanlike ways," and used to talk of him to Polly with a sort of disgust. "Look at that fellow Henley's boy! There's a lad to make something of, and not a day older. There's a fellow that knows how to get through the world and help his father and be of some use. But I seem to be always in luck, and am to get no help from *any* one. No co-operation, but must find bread and drink for all these useless, stupid oafs of children. Other people seem to be better off than I am in every single way."

"Indeed, dearest," said Polly, feeling how just this reproach was as applied to her, "I know that, and it is most unfortunate, and I have often thought it too; that is, if you would only show me, or teach me something, I would even get up earlier, so as to have more time. And as for the children, I am sure by-and-by they will turn out well."

"By-and-by? Oh yes, of course," said he, with much discontent. "There's that fellow Tommy, with his burst-

ing cheeks, herding with all the common ragamuffins of the village. How can I be looking after him? But it's no use; no use. Everything is cast upon me. I see I must do everything myself." And with much disgust and despondency he would turn to his unfinished letter again. Young Tommy Churchill was, indeed, rather inclined to the ungentle pranks alluded to by his father, being what is called "a fine boy," full of health and spirits, enjoying the sun and the fresh air, and the brook side, and the green groves, with that exquisite delight which only belongs to boyhood. He had no ostentatious display of his "book," taking it out to read, but hated it with all the proper dislike of a schoolboy. He could not endure living apart, and, like other "fine boys," in the absence of fitter company, found himself drawn to the society of those worthies of the village whom his father had mentioned. By these he was justly considered their leader, in consideration of his high birth; and at the head of this band, all flushed and crimsoned with heat, and covered with dust, he went on expeditions against birds and their nests, and brooks and their fish, and even orchards and their fruits. That was a day of note in the annals of these marauding parties, when at a kind of half public, half private garden, six miles away, they found some local plunderers already engaged, who discharged some very small and hard apples at them, a fire which was at once returned; and it was long told at Cumberley, in juvenile circles, how a hard French apple had been seen to "split" on the lip or cheek of a local boy, launched by the strong arm of Tommy Churchill. This

blow changed the combat from a mere distant skirmish ; for the local boy, a good head over Tommy, filled with resentment at such an outrage, *coram populo*, as it were, gave over distant warfare, and, heading his party, rushed to close quarters with the others.

Then it was that Tommy stood up manfully and achieved a reputation in the village. Nearly all his own following fled on the instant, deserting him ignobly. Only a faithful henchman remained. Both were prisoners of war, and a frightful retaliation for the swelled lip was being planned leisurely, corresponding to the regular practice of war Indians beyond the seas, when Tommy, being suddenly gifted with fluency, proposed an honourable single combat with such candour and eloquence that the public voice came round to his side, and compelled the other to enter forthwith into preliminaries for an immediate duello. On this prospect the fugitives began to emerge from their hiding-places, and assisted in forming a ring and encouraging the chief they had deserted. That battle was long talked of, and often rehearsed by the junior fireside or on the swinging gate. The enemy was taller by nearly a head than Tommy ; but the latter was not dismayed, and for many rounds "stood up" to the adversary, receiving the most tremendous "punishment." Yet Tommy would not give in, and dealt blows of blind and frantic desperation on his enemy. Both faces bore terrible marks of blacknesses and swellings. It was interrupted by the appearance of a village constable, by whom they were parted. The battle was pronounced to be handsomely drawn — but the

real battle was to commence on Tommy's return home.

As Tommy was slinking home by bye-lanes and skirting paths, very ingloriously—for now that the excitement was gone, the dread consequences of presenting himself as such a spectacle before his father seemed to loom before him in hideous shadows, and as he came out on the road, he suddenly met a portly gentleman face to face. He had come full on Doctor Henley, striding along, reading a newspaper, putting forth his legs as though they were great cranks.

He started when he saw Tommy. "Hallo! youngster!—what, bruising? For shame of yourself, Sir Go home and get washed, Sir."

Up at the Hall only the next day the doctor said to the Squire after dinner, "Dreadfully that Churchill brings up his family. The man is so busy begging and touting he lets his sons run wild through the parish. It's really scandalous. Only last evening I met that Tommy, fresh from a street fight, all over mud, blood, and dirt, frightfully mauled, fighting some butcher's boy. Poor wretch!—not his fault, for he has been taught no better."

The Squire laughed loud. "I like a lad that has spirit. I like a lad that will stand well up to his man."

"Algernon, my boy, has been brought up never to soil his fingers with such scum. Of course, if he is attacked he must defend himself—quite right and proper; but really, to be struggling with butchers and people of that sort, and a clergyman's son!"

"Tommy is always in a scrape, and always will be, I suspect," said the Squire.

Polly had been coming down her cabin stairs, when Tommy was stealing into the house, and was inexpressibly shocked by the bloody spectacle. He was completely altered, and his face changed, and with difficulty she repressed a scream. He was, however, smuggled away safely up stairs; his wounds washed and bound up tenderly by the softest fingers in the world; his blubbering account of the struggle sympathised with, and the fluctuating fortunes of the field followed with tearful eyes. Through Polly's exertions, almost superhuman, swellings were got down and blacknesses disguised; and a little wine abstracted from the store administered by way of medicine.

And Mr. Churchill, abstracted during dinner, and busy with an imaginary conversation held with the Lord Bishop of Gravesend, would not have noticed if he had even a distortion in his face, or horn growing out at one side. Polly scarcely eat at all, from the agitation she was in; which had not nearly betrayed the matter so much as Tommy's absurdly guilty manner. But the dinner was happily got through. The clergyman retired with the Bishop of Gravesend, and all danger was thus averted.

But in the morning, as Mr. Churchill was "going down town," at his usual hour, he met the Squire walking gaily along, and was "hailed" boisterously, in due course. "So, my man Tommy has been at it. Henley has been telling me all about it. He and some village

fellow were at it for an hour,—and though he was a good head over him, he settled him finally. Well done, Tommy, I say. Halden, the keeper, heard all about it this morning.”

“What does all this mean?” said the clergyman, in furious wonder.

“Why, my dear man, didn’t you see his face when he came home? Why, he had the map of Europe on it, quite distinct. Henley said he never saw such a picture. Well done, Tommy, I say!”

And the Squire, who loved his jest, went his way, laughing loudly; leaving the clergyman half stupefied—not at the mauling his son had received, but at “Henley.” “The man” would send the story, with Heaven knows what exaggeration, travelling through the parish, and of course take care it got to Brindley. No fear of that. It would be grist, indeed, to his mill. The man, so unprincipled in everything, would take good care to work it to his discredit. But that imp—that oaf—that half-savage—who was dragging him back in this way in spite of all his own struggling exertions; it was intolerable, and must be stopped.

In this train of reflection he paced home. But not wholly displeased, for there was a scene of excitement before him. Polly was summoned to the study, and received with the usual self-commiserating, half-objurgatory attack.

“Isn’t this nice work? Is this the way you look after those children, letting them run wild through the parish, disgracing me? No wonder I can’t get forward in the

world, when I have such scandals as that to be brought against me! Isn't this nice work, to have that man Henley going about telling every one of his meeting that yahoo, all bloody and dirty, after some low fight with a butcher. Bring him down here. I'll soon know how to stop this sort of thing."

It was no use for Polly to plead. But the worst part was, that Tommy having already congratulated himself on escaping so successfully, was now beginning to be alive to the complacency of victory, and had been invited out that morning to join a party for the flying of a large kite, as a guest of distinction whom it was an honour to meet. Polly had to break the news to him. It was as good as saying that the officers of justice were below; he was full of spirits, and the shock was tremendous. There was no retreating, the clergyman was already impatient; and the trembling child had to go down and present himself. Polly hovered close to him, for a time only; for the clergyman presently turned on her: "And have you nothing to do, but staring? Is there nothing to be done in the house? Are none of those wild creatures up stairs to be kept out of mischief, or must I go and do it myself? God help us! but we are coming to a nice pass."

Polly had to glide away, and the luckless Tommy was left unsupported. There for nearly half an hour his father railed, and ordered him into confinement. From that hour the matter was never let to drop. For he gained a certain complacency in bringing back the matter. It was never allowed to languish. To it he attributed

all his future failure, as it gave a handle—a fatal opening—to “that man Henley.” It explained every hindrance perfectly and most satisfactorily. That fight, though it brought glory, in a certain sense, to Tommy, was a sore recollection for long afterwards. What a weary time Polly must have had of it, in that strict round of elderly offices ! Only conceive of a fine young girl, with warm blood and affections, and even enthusiasm, thus cut off from all her natural pleasures, and turned into a drudge or charwoman. For she differed but little ; and was upon her knees nearly as long and as often, cutting out upon the floor, or fitting tiny dresses on tiny and unaccommodating shapes. But her cheerfulness she never lost. All the bounty of nature outside ; the endless rich stuffs, velvets, and brocades which that kindly dame unrolled and spread out for her so lavishly, feasted her eyes. The fresh air was hers ; the delightful “green lanes” of the place ; good health ; and her affection for the dear father, which had literally no depth. That sacred and golden cloud rose softly and enveloped everything—it turned their rude furniture into gilded ornaments—enlarged their modest dwelling into a palace—made all things luxurious—his cold dry utterances became, to her ears, most musical, divinely harmonious—his rude discontents and pettishness, but too often vented on her, a mere shape of repinings and expostulations, which went to her very heart and touched all her sympathy.

Once indeed had come a little break ; but it was only for a time. Close to Cumberley, and with its gate actually in the village, was Godfrey Hall, seat of Squire

Godfrey, where that capital landlord, and proprietor of true English breed, lived with his family. He had a charming daughter, whom some parish novel readers, of the good old school, likened to the charming Sophia Western, that most delicious of heroines, and whose picture should have come to us in the clear natural colouring of Leslie. These two young ladies conceived a violent partiality for each other when both were not more than fourteen or fifteen, and had many sweet hours of converse down the gravel walks of the Hall, on the most interesting topics. It must be said that the Squire himself never relished the clergyman very much, saying of him, half-jocosely, half contemptuously, that "he was a dreadful little schemer." He had no sympathy with him, and listened with a half-amused air while the clergyman would eagerly expound some plan, the personal reference and perhaps selfishness of which he fancied no one saw but himself. Our Polly was sadly distressed at this unjust estimation of her father, and by many prettily indirect arts strove very hard to do away with the impression on the mind of the Squire; in which that good-natured gentleman had suffered her to believe she had succeeded.

Meanwhile the village was busy with what might be called the Burgess affair. With some he was too good for her; with others she was too good for him. Nothing reliable was to be got out of Mr. Churchill.

"A very good, well-disposed young fellow," said Mr. Churchill, "indeed; no harm in him in the world—always in and out here."

The secret of this indifference was that contractors are known to have no Church patronage, and were of but poor account in his eyes.

"Has your father," he said, cross-examining young Burgess at one of their first interviews, "estates of his own?"

"No, Sir, though I am sure he will, one of these days——"

"Oh, of course," said the other; "of course. Some relations in the Church—*high*, I mean?"

"Oh, yes, Sir; my brother Charley is in orders, and has just got a curacy down in Westmoreland."

"A what?" said the reverend gentleman, with strong disgust. "And I suppose a long tail of children after him?"

"Why they *are* coming," said young Burgess, "very fast. The poorest have the most, Sir: very odd, isn't it?"

"I thought so," said the clergyman, contemptuously, scarcely thinking how much this depreciation applied to his own case.

It was becoming apparent, however, to the whole parish that the young engineer and Miss Polly were growing to like each other. They went out together—they walked together. He was always in and out of the house with the perfect approbation or indifference of her reverend father, who found the youth useful. He cared very little about the attachment, which was mere "folly and nonsense," for he had assumed as of course that Polly in any case should be disposed of to secure his

advancement—and that was hers. Besides, the great contractor might, some time or other, have ecclesiastical interest growing out of his contract; and already his son had begun “to plague him” about a Mr. Churchill, a most accomplished and pious man, who had been cruelly neglected in the Church.

Harry Burgess was a handsome, healthy, open fellow, that had leaped many a hedge and ditch as he went along surveying, and was quick, cheerful, eager in everything as in his loves. On the appearance of one of the children in the midst of some of Mr. Burgess’s most interesting conversations, his hopes, his plans, this self-training had such power, that her eye wandered uneasily, and her thoughts were at once drawn off.

Meanwhile, the great viaduct was advancing rapidly—the line was being made with all speed; and soon the branch, where our lovers were busy working out their line, would be completed—alas! with a too fatal speed, for Harry was pitilessly compelled to shorten his sweet sojourn by his own superhuman exertions. There could scarcely be conceived anything more ludicrously cruel than this being made the minister of one’s own chastisement—one’s own lictor, as it were, and even Nemesis!





CHAPTER VI.

POLLY'S MORNING WALK.



LITTLE later on, all household matters having been diligently gone through, and the reverend owner of the house having finished his important correspondence and gone up "on town," Polly went to get her bonnet and little cloak. She was going out to market—having first been relieved duly on her watch by that trusty sentry, Bridget.

It was something like a picture to see Polly stepping lightly forth with her hand on the little wooden gate. She was going the same road as her father, and about the same time, and would have given the world to have been allowed to rest her small hand on *his* beloved arm, and so have walked "into town" with the most delightful state. She would have been quite content to have maintained strictest silence, so as not to have distracted his important personal dreams and speculations—dreams in which there was only room for his own tall and white-tied person to be seen bending and complimenting. A pretty figure, hers ! light, airy, and with a tender Greuze-

like face ; with no magnificence of dress, and yet with an air of being well and becomingly dressed. The bonnet, out of which the pale-pink face seemed to break and blossom, like a rose from its leaves, was some two years old—a long life for such butterfly articles—and had originally been constructed by the joint fingers of herself and Bridget. So with the little cloak and pretty dress. Yet there was nothing shabby ; or *reduced* air of the “poor dress maker.” She knew too well what was owing to her father’s pride.

She tripped along, and so fast and lightly, that very soon she had all but overtaken her fond father, who having met Doctor Bottomley, one of the county doctors, had stopped to enter into conversation with that gentleman, in reference to the health of “poor old Cottle,” vicar of the next parish, who had been in a bad way these six months. She drew back in a fright ; and indeed, it was quite as well that she had not joined her father, who was in a very discontented mood, *forcing* old Cottle, who had rallied, to retire, and give up his charge for the good of the Church, and to better men. “It is a scandal, my lord,” she would have heard her father pressing on an imaginary bishop, “that such drones should have the sacred charge of souls intrusted to ’em,” &c.

Polly escaping this danger, fluttered on, meeting now and again some humble friend, who knew her, and curtsied to her. The clergyman’s daughter was indeed well known, not as the professional “clergyman’s daughter,” who has an official right of entry to all the

houses of the parish. They knew her by a hundred little kindly offices and even sympathising gaieties ; for she loved the bright and pleasant things of life, enjoyed her dance, and thought a valse paradise, having been two or three times at the house of the squire close by who had a living in his gift, one of the county gods, indeed, Mr. Godfrey, of Godfrey Hall, whom the persevering clergyman, learning that old Cottle, the incumbent, was "breaking a good deal," absolutely persecuted. They were all kind to her there ; and thither did Polly often attend her parent, dazzled with the show ; and there was made known to a splendid officer, Captain F. Childers, with whom she danced that valse to which the lovely music played, and the lights danced round ; and which for long after turned her into a sort of Cinderella returned from the ball. As she worked caps and frocks, and shall it be said, even miniature *trousers* for young Billy and Philpotts, and the busy fingers plied hard and fast, she at times feasted her imagination with a picture of this night, lighting up the wax lights, and making the music play, and the courtly figure of the grave and accomplished Childers stand before her, bowing. There were dry and mouldy women in the parish—ladies, who by some kiln process had all the softness and juices of charity dried out of them—who were very severe on this excess, and never allowed its memory to rust. "Nice bringing up that," they said, "for a clergyman's daughter, eh?" On this day she had done all her household buying, not very much, at the butcher's and grocer's — the butcher was

always gracious, and never made any of his growling remonstrances to *her* — and she had got to the far end of the village. Not very many roods farther on, and just turning the corner, she would come to that annoying work now in progress, and pushed on with great diligence by the contractors, the famous Cumberley viaduct, which crossed a river and a valley on no less than fifteen solid brick arches. While it was being made, the working people from the manufacturing town made excursions regularly, as to a centre of amusement, bringing their cold meat and cheese and beer. They camped on the green hillside, and looked with wonder at the great engines, and at the “travelers,” and were dinned as they feasted with the heavy crash of the pile-driver. There was pumping going on, and a little diving — caissons, &c.; so there was prodigious entertainment. It is hard to say how many millions of bricks were used in this great work. Burgess and Younghusband, who were the contractors, could tell: a great many more than they had contracted for, as the foundation had turned out to be sandy and shifting, and after all sorts of failures they were now said to be making that part of the line at a dead loss. Young Harry Burgess, son to one of the contractors, was learning his business here as overseer or half engineer.

Polly, business now being off her mind, thought she would go on a little bit further, and see how they were doing with the viaduct. She could even “come round home” by that way. She was looking down into the

little valley, saw the trellis of scaffolding, the black-grimed steam horses gliding along, puffing coal-black smoke; the dark figures crawling and swarming as they paddled and puddled; the solemn vacuums that seemed to lead into deep pits; and through all this confusion made out the cheerful red half arches rising slowly. She stood looking, and in a moment a young man came running to her side. He was fresh, honest, brown-haired, was rosy-cheeked and handsome, and very strongly made also.

"This is very good of you, dearest," he said, "to come and pay me a visit in my working clothes. I hardly expected you would come; you are so busy always. I saw you," said the young man, gaily, "from the top of an arch, with all these grimy creatures about me. Come and see how we are getting on. Would you like to go down the new caisson? You would be astonished at the beauty of our work; as neat and as close as cabinet-making—as fine as that little handkerchief you were hemming."

Polly, always interested where others *wanted* her to be interested, looked down a little timorously. "It is getting on very fast," she said; "it will be done soon. Why, it seems only yesterday it was begun."

The young man looked down. "I wish it could be years doing, Polly," he said. "But we are bound by time to the day. Indeed, fancy what it must be for *me*, pushing on these fellows, and hurrying on my own unhappiness. Why, it's like the fellow sawing away the branch of the tree under him. Unless, indeed, before that time your

father thinks better of me, or becomes a dean or a bishop. By the way, my father's coming down at last to look at the works. He is to be here this evening. I wish he could see *you*, Polly, dear; it would be good for his old sore eyes. But he is so difficult to manage; he cares to see nobody but his navvies. And even your father,—I think it would be as well they did not meet; they would not suit."

Polly looked down, then turned her soft eyes on him, and said, earnestly, "He might, you know; he is so wise and clever, and, as he says, has so many irons in the fire."

"Too many, I am afraid," the young man said, smiling; "or *are* they in the fire at all?"

A little distress was in Polly's face at this doubt. "He knows best; for he is the cleverest and wisest person about here. And as I have always told you, dear Harry, I like you, and—if you choose to call it so—love you. But it must all depend on *him*. Only think of the weary years and years he has been planning and toiling, all for me, and for the children at home; and all the unkindness and ingratitude he has been met with. And now, when I hope what he has struggled for is not far off, I must try and help and make some little return; for I know, dear Harry, he counts on me to help him in some way. So we must wait, dear Harry, if it is to be ten years more, or, indeed, if——"

She stopped. Young Burgess answered, sadly, "Or if he should propose some one else? I have understood all this long ago, though I have vainly protested against

it; but I cannot see that any child is so bound by her love to her father as to sacrifice youth, love, happiness, and everything to her duty. Hardly," said the young man, warming and colouring with earnestness, "hardly I think. No priest or parson in the land will tell you *that*; they will tell you the contrary, I think. What! you are to wear out your hopes, loves, enjoyments, all in this miserable round of drudgery, with no sign of change or alteration, and all under this delusion of devotion. Your father, my dear Polly, has a more practical mind than your fond and gentle heart fancies. He is only thinking—and naturally—of himself and his advancement; he wishes to keep you with him. What could he do with that nursery of children?"

"Oh! Harry, Harry," she said, with reproach, and a sort of panic in her gentle face, "*don't* speak in that way. You do not understand him, and *cannot*. You are so much with these practical business men you cannot be expected to know his wonderful unselfishness—the anxiety on his mind—how he works—works for us all. And oh! when I think of the way they neglect him, and every mere schemer and intriguer is put forward and advanced,—every obsequious toadeater, as he says, is sure to get on,—oh! it would be cruel and sinful and selfish, Harry, not to help him as he has helped us, and forward his wishes in every way by my little aid."

She was so devotional—so earnest in this delusion, as it seemed to Burgess, and so saintly, that he could not answer for a moment, but remained looking at her with the deepest admiration and delight.

"You are an angel," he said; "and I suppose you are right. I wish—I only wish—I could get Burgess and Younghusband to contract for some church or cathedral. But they never will. That sort of thing is considered the worst line of business with us. No security—all begging money—and all promises and entreaties. But as I tell 'em, even a small church or chapel-of-ease; they could make *that* pay; and then I would 'get in' with the dean or the bishop, and we'd have your father promoted in no time. I'd know how to recommend myself—little indulgences and alterations not charged for—and then make my terms. But I suppose there's no help for it. My father, Burgess, has his hands so full now that he don't even answer my letters, he's so busy with his building-ground speculations. By the way, I wish he didn't quite speculate so much. What, going away? Why, we have said nothing to each other yet. I want to show you the caisson, and the new steam-engine."

Polly smiled, and looking up into his face with her own trustful look—and it was a face now glowing with the flush of colour—took both his hands in hers. "We must keep these treats for another time. Indeed, I will, and come and look at them all. And I may bring Dick and Tommy, I suppose. I *think*," she added, wistfully, "I see a sort of taste in Dicky for these things. He breaks up his toys to see the inside."

Dicky certainly had engineering tastes, in the way of building up chairs, knocking down tables, &c.

"Well," said Harry, "at the proper time we shall put him into my father's office, as a matter of course; and

Tommy too. Do stay, I want to talk to you about that."

"No, no," said Polly, in a flutter; "I must go. Papa will be home; and I must have something ready to tempt him to eat his lunch."

Then Polly, now more brilliant than when she came, and the blood mantling under her transparent skin, tripped away. The delightful Watteau, the charming Lancry would have secured her at once—powdered her soft brown hair, dressed in her pale blue satin tucked up about a hoop, set a carnation coloured bow in her low bodice, and placed her near a *bosquet* in a French garden. She sighed as she tripped along, for she saw, and had seen long before, that all these hopes on which the young man feasted himself, down at his caissons and pile-drivers, were no more than a dream. Her curious, patient, unselfish little soul was trained to the view she had just explained of her father's complete supremacy, and to the idea that every other object must as of course fall into the train of his arrangements as if from some physical law of nature, and without any parade of duty or affection. Her only protest was that sigh; just as a young girl would sigh at a rainy day that put an end to her party of pleasure, and could not lay the fault on the rain.





CHAPTER VII.

MADAME FRENCH.

THE young man went back to his engines ; dismissed the image of his love from his soul ; and with working drawings in his hand was shouting up scaffoldings, and down caissons and iron cylinders, to foremen. These were the foremen of Burgess and Younghusband, "the eminent contractors." The navvies, the horses, the engines, the carts of Burgess and Younghusband, how many miles of railway had they not laid ? How many miles of bridges, of earthworks and embankments—what waterworks—vast drainings—archings—high levels—and what not, had they carried ? The names of "Burgess and Younghusband" were known everywhere. They had even made a short line in Algiers. They were near obtaining a contract for a Belgian Exhibition. It was wonderful to see how, when a contract was signed for a work in some barbarous district, lo ! almost by magic appeared all Burgess and Younghusband's waggons, and horses, and engines, and

navvies, who in a day or so were all at work. Young-husband had been a "ganger" himself; Burgess, a clerk. They were a wonderful pair of men, daring, hardworking; and seemed neither to spend nor keep any of the money that they made, but put it out in fresh ventures—wonderful men—so national—of the stuff that made England what it was! they were thus admired. And it was often repeated how Burgess could "have clapped his son into the Life Guards as soon as look at you," but had insisted on his learning the business. "What was good for the father was good enough for the son," he was fond of repeating. He owed no one anything; he had never in his life asked anything of any man, nor wouldn't till he went to his grave. He wore an old working-coat, but he had paid for it, which was more than many a fine fellow could say for *his* coat. He had never put himself under a compliment for sixpence worth to any man. As the Rev. Mr. Churchill was to find out when the great contractor came down in person to look at the works.

When Polly was tripping home again, after this interview, her mind beginning to stray away to her charges at home—as though she felt she must not indulge in pleasant pictures of fancy—she heard suddenly a cheerful voice behind her, with an eager step: she knew both.

"Halloa! halloa! wont you wait for me, Miss Polly? Never mind then, walk on. See if I don't overtake you." And in another moment her small hand was in the broad honest palm of the Squire.

"I didn't hear you, indeed," she said.

"I knew you," he went on, "a mile off. I know that little bonnet of yours a mile off. I am very glad, my dear child, you don't take to those impudent hats. I wouldn't let Fanny put one on for the best horse in the county. I've just been down looking at a mare for Fan. But she won't do. *That* I saw with half an eye. For hit or miss is always the way with me, my dear. I'm no good if I go pottering, and get worse every minute. I always find what a fellow is the first two minutes. That's the way I did with their poor mamma. It was made up in a day, my dear." The Squire was fond of going on in this sort of ruminative way, half address, half soliloquy. And being a natural, genuine man, became at times really interesting to others with hearts as genuine as his own.

"By the way, do you know what I am posting home for? Quite forgot all about it, when I was with that horse fellow; now guess. Try, there's a good clever girl, as I know *you* are."

Polly saw that he *wished* her to guess, so she stopped in the road, and with a smile she said, "I am sure, to be in time to ride out with little Fanny."

The Squire smiled. "Ah, you artful Miss Polly, you know my old heart. Well, not *exactly* for that, but the little hussy is in the business. I declare I let myself be made a great fool of. I know the whole parish think so. Even that Henley says to me that I don't spoil her, but that she spoils me; not so bad of the doctor, eh? See, even *you* knew I must have some folly of the sort in my head. Can't go buy a horse, but she pops her wicked

little head in. Still, I don't think there is much harm done between us. Eh?"

"She's a darling," said Polly, enthusiastically; "and how she loves you."

The Squire's face, which had become reflective, broke into a smile.

"She does—she does—I think, the little hussy. I tell you what we're about. There's a fellow come down to Irnston to paint the mayor; Skryne they call him, a Scotch R.A. and all that. He's getting a ten-pound note of my money for his mayor, whom I was very glad to compliment, and who's a very good fellow in his way, and all that" (a favourite phrase of the squire's.) "But just as we were talking it over with the man—he came down specially; it's a good five hundred pound job to him, frame and all—it came into my mind, there's the boy for little Madame French. 'Did you ever paint a child in your life, Mr. Skryne?' I said. 'I suppose you were at the Academy two years ago?' he said, in a smooth dentist sort of manner, and as if he was washing his hands. 'No? I had there a very pretty family piece. The three infant children of my Lady Carshalton, the Honourable Blanche (I forget the fellows' names) playing in the garden, at Frampton.' I never saw the thing he mentioned, though I was at the place. But I settled with him; and he's coming over after he has finished with his mayor, to do my little Madame French; who is as fine—as a new five-shilling piece this moment, I'll swear!"

They were passing the gate, and Polly, though she had

a sense of doing something wrong, could not resist going up to the house.

"Mr. Skryne come?" he asked.

"Yes, Sir," said his London footman, "he's a-puttin' up his heazle in the boodore."

"All right ; come along, Miss Polly."

They entered the "boodore," and there found a gentleman with long black hair and a very Jewish nose, and that smooth, soft, and confidential manner which it seemed to Polly the Squire had caught very happily.

"We are all quite ready," said the artist, "and only waiting my fair sitter. I have every hope that we shall have all success, and make a pretty picture." Polly also noticed the rather euphuistic turn of his talk.

"Well, I suppose we had better send up again?"

"To be sure—be sure," said the Squire, ringing the bell. "Tell Miss Fanny we are waiting for her. I bet you anything," said the Squire, "the minx, the little vain puss, is busy dressing up her little figure before a glass. Now, Sir, she's as full of tricks as an Antrim goat."

The artist, who never even heard of such an animal, bowed and smiled as if he quite understood.

"Shall I run up?" said Polly, hesitating. "I dare say I might help her."

"The very thing," said the Squire. "Do, my dear child ; away with you. This gentleman's time is guineas."

"No, no, not at all," said the other plaintively—as who should say, I am used to this sort of suffering.

Polly flew away up stairs ; she knew the house perfectly, and looked hastily into each room as she passed. She

ran into the drawing-room, and there before the large gilt pier-glass, which ran down to the ground, found what she was looking for.

Before the great glass was Madame French, as she was called, a little brown-haired girl, who was holding a flower to her hair, and smiling to herself in the glass. She had a tiny fan in one hand, a little blue opera cloak half off her shoulders, and a low white dress trimmed with swansdown. But it was a long dress, "like any grown-up lady's," and she had ear-rings and a gold necklace, and a gold belt round her waist. She saw Polly in the glass entering the room, and said to her in a sweet, though wise and thoughtful voice,

"Tell me, do, what do you think of that?"

Polly kissed her, and, as of course, said it was charming.

"Don't I look, dear," said Madame French, giving a little jump of delight into the air, "as if I was going just off to the opera?"

Polly gave a half sigh, and said she might go to a ball "just as she was, there and then, and step straight into the carriage"—a speech that seemed to delight the little girl more than any general shape of compliment. Now Polly was on her knees before her to arrange or lower a bow, the little madam holding back her head with an anxious air of responsibility while the alteration was done.

"Now, dearest," said Polly, retiring backwards with a sweet smile, "you are *perfect*, and now I think we must not keep the gentleman waiting any more."

"To be sure, to be sure," said the child, then put her hand into Polly's, and made a preparatory skip, quite unbecoming in "a lady going to the opera."

"Do you know, Polly dear, I begin to feel quite nervous. What a *funny* thing, going to have one's picture done!" Then she gave a child's laugh of delight, but grew grave again as she looked down on her long dress, fan, &c.

"Ah! ha!" cried the Squire, "here we are. Here's my little Madame French for you. Won't she do? Won't that look well on canvas? Come here, duck, and give papa a kiss. That's it. This is Mr. Skryne, a great man in his way—my daughter, Madame French."

The little lady made a curtsy, first giving a sweep to her dress; the painter bowed formally. She looked quite grave and gracious. But he was rather disturbed.

"You are wondering at Madame French, I see," said the Squire. "She was born at Dieppe, a French naturalised subject, or half-subject, Sir, of his Majesty the Emperor. At the proper time, when we grow, we shall be presented to him at court. Shan't we, Tootles?"

"But," said Mr. Skryne, "still I am really afraid this will hardly do. You see, for a child's dress—that sort of thing," and he pointed with his brush.

"Why, what's the matter?" said the Squire, disturbed himself. "What do you object to?"

"I was an hour dressing," said Madame French, in a faltering, pleading voice; "I was, indeed, papa. All the ladies wear this."

"Of course they do, duck. Why, what would you have?—a gown's a gown any day."

"Oh it would be ludicrous—absurd," said the painter. "I really couldn't have my name go to such a thing. Lady Carshalton's three children are in the garden at Frampton, with children's frocks. The thing would become a burlesque."

"My God, Sir," said the Squire, and stopped.

Madame French had a very small delicately-cut face—pale and refined ("I wish she had a touch of your Tommy's colour!" the Squire would say to Polly)—a most elegant high-bred looking little sylph. She was fond, too, of glueing two tiny little curls to her cheek. Never did so arrant a little coquette "mince" through a room. She had her own trinket and jewel case. Yet at this moment there was a wistful anxiety over her face, and she looked from one to the other in much distress. She saw that the splendid effect she had laboured at had not given satisfaction. That mortification gave almost a look of pain to her face.

Polly saw all this with a pain almost as great as was in the little lady's heart, and a sudden idea occurring to her, she ran over to the artist, and whispered to him. That gentleman looked doubtful, shook his head, then smiled.

"What's up now?" called out the Squire. "Miss Polly, do you want to get our friend to take *you*?"

"Well," said Mr. Skryne, "I suppose it will do very well. What I think is this—we can do the young lady as though she were going to a fancy ball: and I really

think it would be a novelty," he added ; "a little girl dressed as a grown-up lady, and in quite a fancy dress."

Mr. Skryne gave this reflectively, as though it was an original idea that had just occurred to him ; and later that day at dinner the Squire said that he was a clever fellow, and had made a great deal out of a difficulty.

"Well, then, we had better set to work," said the artist, hastily arranging his apparatus, "and lose no time. Now, young lady, just take up a position. Anything you like ; something natural, you know. I think," he added, turning to the Squire, "some one should remain that knows her, because really I could not undertake to manage her at all."

It was clear there was but one person for the office—Polly. But still she was as necessary elsewhere, and her father would be home presently ; and though he would not want her, she not being in his way for conversation or society, still she knew that the very fact of her being absent would be enough to make him require her, and discover that he was the most neglected father on earth. But there also happily occurred to her another view—namely, that he was anxious to conciliate and oblige the Squire in every way, and that he would not resent her staying an hour or so with such a friend.

Mr. Skryne graciously assented to the choice, and added, indeed, "that no better selection could be made."





CHAPTER VIII.

THE PORTRAIT.

BUT the difficulty was a fitting attitude. This caused infinite trouble and some pettishness.

“My dear lady, do as you would do in the garden. How would you throw yourself on the grass, and have a good tumble? Try and be natural.”

The little lady remained stiff and pale, with her eyes fixed on the artist.

“Don’t you hear me, my good child?” he said, a little testily. “I can’t take you *that* way.”

“*I never tumble on the grass,*” said Madame French, with infinite dignity.

Polly and the artist looked at each other and smiled. “No, indeed, you do not,” said she.

“Well, that was the way we took Lady Carshalton’s children; and I must say more intelligent, well-conducted children I never saw. Such restraint! But they were perfect little aristocrats — perfect. Well, wait now; I

don't know but that with a rich, deep ultramarine tapestry background, and a heavy dark green carpet, and she standing up, we might work out a very fine bit of colour for the Academy wall."

Quite satisfied now, Mr. Skryne went to work. Polly sat beside her, and adroitly kept her attention engaged ; Skryne now again breaking into some of what he called his "sitting" stories, which, as he told Polly, he kept "to start expression." Many of these began : "When I went down to Tipton, to take Sir John for the Hunt," or, "When Mrs. Charteris sent for me ;" or with a little forgetfulness, straying back to Frampton and the Carshalton children, which seemed to have been the remarkable "order" of his life, or his best work, or who perhaps were his most distinguished sitters.

Towards the end of the sitting, he quite passed over Madame French, and became gracious to Polly. "Your cast of features would do very well indeed on canvas. Some of the historical men would be very glad indeed to put you in. That's not in my way you know, unless what we call a character portrait. Lady Tusker, a charming creature, was taken as a shepherdess, by that fellow Hulkes, whom they made an Associate the other day. A rank job ; you might as well think of making that young lady there——"

Mr. Skryne, it will be seen, did not like children, having much the same feeling towards them as to dogs in a room. Having no sympathy, therefore, with his subject, it was not surprising that Lady Carshalton always spoke of his *chef d'œuvre* at Frampton as "that cruel

daub ;” and only my lord’s affection for his little girls at that age, of whom it was some sort of a likeness, preserved it from destruction. Madame French, like other children, knew this instinct of his perfectly, and disliked him from the first. Even in his remark about the Associate there was a needless comparison.

After nearly two hours’ diligent sketching, and Polly was so much entertained by the “sitting” stories, and the airs and arts of the little lady, that it did not seem to her half an hour, she was startled by seeing Mr. Skryne stop angrily, and looking to the door, say fiercely :—

“Well, Sir? Go away. What do you want here?”

This was a young gentleman with very rosy healthy cheeks, and in a green frock, who, from the heat and dust on his person, had evidently run the whole way—wherever he had started from.

Polly knew her brother, Tommy, and started. She had come back to prose life again.

“What is it, dear?” she said, anxiously; “is papa waiting?”

The boy was in great confusion, rolling up his cap into a small package :

“He says you are to come back, Polly, at once, and sent me to tell you.”

“To be sure, dear; and can it be so late?” said Polly, getting on her bonnet very hastily.

“Well, I think that will do for this morning. How the lad stares!”

Tommy was indeed staring at the little lovely lady,

dressed for her ball, and at the same time was advancing loutishly. His hand hung down, large and very red and raw.

Madame French, with an indescribable air of sly consciousness, kept strictly in the same attitude, clearly enjoying his hesitation. "How d'e do, Tommy?" she said at last, with her head on one side, and her cheek resting on her neck; "are you afraid?"

Tommy, with a half-timorous look from the artist to Polly, let his large honest mouth open slowly with a grin, advanced and put out his hot hand to the little queen.

"No, no, Tommy, dear," said Polly, interposing, "not now. You have been throwing stones,—and sods, too,—you bold fellow. Tommy, dear, you must have **known** you were coming to pay a visit to Fanny, and I do wonder——"

"I knew she'd be out," said Tommy, promptly, "on the pony. She takes a ride at this hour always."

"He's quite right," said Madame French, arranging her cloak; "only to-day, Tommy, papa wished me to be painted. But when you come back, Tommy, and get clean, I shall shake hands with you—indeed, I will."

Tommy was indeed scarcely suited for a drawing-room; and looked ruefully down at his green frock, which was splashed in parts; and at his hands, which were stained. Had it been his father he would have heard, "Get away, you filthy fellow; get out of my sight. Here, Polly—Bridget—look at the state of this boy. It's a disgrace. But it's always the way. None of you will take the trouble. They live in a piggery."

The little girl saw his mortification, and walking up to him with a stately sweep of her dress, putting her lips forward, said with great pride, "How do you like me?"

Tommy found himself looking guiltily from side to side, quite conscious of the painful exhibition those fatal cheeks were making of him. "Such a queer dress!"

Madame looked grave at this criticism; then tossed her head. "This is what is fashionable. You have only been in the country, Tommy, so you can't know."

"But I know," faltered Tommy, plunging in despair into an outrageous compliment, "*what* you look beautiful in. *That's* for a grown-up lady."

This was worse: the first half would have carried him over; but he was always, and always to be, an unlucky blunderer.

They heard other voices coming near, the cheery one of the Squire over the others. "This way—this way, Doctor. Now we will see the work. Bring the young gentleman, too. Here, Sir, this way; I want to introduce you."

Entered now the Squire, the great stalking florid Doctor Henley, with his handkerchief to his forehead—for the day was sultry—and he held by the hand his white-faced son Algernon.

"Sitting—sitting—indeed?" said the doctor; "dear me! At Formanton there was a clever Frenchman came, who did my lord and my lady both; uncommon good likenesses they were. How do you do, Sir? What have you made of our young lady?"

"Only a sketch, Sir," said Mr. Skryne; "gets on

slowly at first. They have some good pictures at Formanton."

"Oh! indeed; you know Formanton?"

"I was there very often. Two Gainsboroughs, two Sir Joshuas—a child in her lap."

"His lordship is one of my best and earliest—Here, Miss Fanny, I want to introduce this gentleman, Mr. Algernon Henley. He's just come from Euxton, where he has been staying with one of his young friends."

Mr. Algernon bowed, and Madame French made a sort of awkward curtsy. Mr. Algernon had a cane, with which he whipped his 'boot. He had been over looking at the artist's work—stared at it coldly—and turned away without any remark.

"They had a house full of people at Euxton, had they, Algernon?" asked the doctor, smiling.

"Yes, papa; and Sir Thomas himself and Lady Euxton, and young Harold Cooper, Lord Melcombe's son, and Lady Clarges."

"And Mr. Parker the member, wasn't he there, Algernon? They've fine pictures at Euxton, Algernon tells me."

Mr. Algernon had a thin, quick, sharp voice; and answered "Yes, papa. He was done in London, on his horse, by Sir William Shee. Sir William, of course, wouldn't come down to Euxton."

The artist coloured and turned away angrily. Doctor Henley was so complaisant and smiling over his son's acquaintance with high life, that he did not perceive the effect of this speech.

The little lady was listening half-shily, half in awe and wonder at the cultivation and worldly polish of one no older than herself; while Tommy, still in all his heat and dust, hung about, afar off, with his finger to his mouth; feeling himself a sort of pariah or "ploughman's son," (a more intelligible idea to him), and was becoming stolid and sulky. No one had noticed, no one had thought of him.

"Algernon was ten days at Euxton, or a fortnight—which, Algernon?"

"Monday till Thursday week. Sir Thomas wanted me to stay longer, but I couldn't well, you know."

"No, of course not; very proper feeling, Algernon. They will be glad to have you again; instead of outstaying your welcome, as another might do. Tell Miss Fanny about the dinner."

"Oh Lord! papa, it was nothing," the young gentleman said, speaking fluently. "They had the two members to dine, and they made speeches."

"And positively they would have Algernon to return thanks for the ladies: only think! and he did it too. Sir Thomas said he never saw more command or coolness."

"Oh Lord! it was nothing, papa. I just said I was obliged to 'em, and all that. Easy enough when you come to try it." He then slapped his boot with his cane, and walked over to the window. His father nodded his head approvingly after him.

"Algernon will make his way. I wish I had the letter Sir Thomas wrote me about him; quite sorry to lose him.

But must go back to his seminary. Oh ! that's Churchill's boy, I think ? and Miss Churchill ? How d'e do, Sir ? Your papa well, too ? ”

Tommy's eyes were following the pair who were in the window ; the young gentleman being engaged talking fluently, and making the remarks of a man of the world, to his wondering admirer, Madame French.

He answered bluntly, “ Yes, he's very well. ”

“ When is he going to send you to school, I should like to know ? ” said the doctor, a little maliciously ; “ I think it is rather getting to be time. Hey ? ”

Tommy turned his eyes on him : his lips were beginning to drop. With a sulky air and with defiance, he answered, “ I'm *not* going to school at all. ”

Polly, who knew these symptoms about as well as a mariner does the signs of a coming gale, had her hand on his shoulder, and was stooping down to look in his face.

“ Now, dear, tell Doctor Henley how you are getting on. You know soon you will have to go. ”

“ Well, if I was that lad's father, ” said the doctor, speaking as if of a trunk, “ I'd pack him off at once. I assure you it shouldn't be delayed a moment ; a little of their treatment there, you understand, would do him a world of good. ”

“ What, ” said the Squire, “ send away poor Tommy ? What has he done ? ”

“ He's a very good boy, indeed, ” said Polly, colouring ; “ most obedient and useful. Indeed he is ; and don't require any school. ” And for the moment, forgetting

her usual restraint, Polly looked a little defiantly at the reverend doctor, the hereditary enemy of her house.

He merely "blew" out of his lips—Æolus like—an impatient motion of intolerance favourite with him, and then turned away. He had an utter contempt for the whole "set," whom he always spoke of as "a poor tribe."

Tommy, unhappy child, had no animosity to him then ; he was glaring over at the pair in the window, and growing more uncouth and ugly about his cheeks and jaws every moment. The iron was entering into his soul with infinite agony. It was now all but red hot, and being turned slowly round in his vitals. But there was worse in store for him ; for the doctor, looking over to the window, became complacent again, and nodding, said :

"'Pon my word ! look there. Something going on, I say. I assure you, Algernon in his little way is quite a man of the world, and knows how to talk to the ladies. I must bring over that letter of Sir Thomas's. I assure you there was a Miss Mountford there, he says, whom he quite captivated. See how my gentleman talks. Oh, he'll do, Sir ! I've no fears for him."

And then the reverend doctor turned absently to Tommy, looking down on him with an all but expressed opinion in his face, "Not much likelihood of *your* doing, my lad."

Polly saw it was time to go ; and much distressed about the mortification this last half-hour had brought her favourite, said softly, "Come away, dear."

"By the way," the Squire struck in, "when shall we

have that artist gentleman again? Come over here, Madame French. No goings on in my windows, Ma'am."

"Why interrupt them?" the doctor said, with an inexpressible air of enjoyment. "Most unfair, I say. We wouldn't have liked it ourselves, Squire."

"Ha! ha! ha! very good. Now, my dear, shall I tell this gentleman the day after to-morrow, at the same time?"

The little lady put back her head with a kind of languishing air. "Oh, dear, is he coming so soon again? But it will do, papa, very well, I think." And she looked, as if for advice, to her new admirer.

"Of course he must come when he's paid for it," he said pertly; "and I'll come too."

"Do, do," said the young lady, eagerly.

"Oh, yes, I will."

"Then I tell you what," said the Squire heartily, "as our young friend has a short time of it before him, he may as well come and dine on that day. And you, too, doctor."

"He will be delighted. Eh, Algernon?"

"I shall be very happy indeed, Squire," said the young gentleman, promptly.

"And," added the Squire, suddenly, as if an unexpected and rather far-fetched idea had come to him, "why not have Mr. Tommy, too? I declare—yes—a regular gentleman's party given by Madame French. Eh? What do you say to that, Sir?"

Tommy, looking ruefully from one to the other—

swelling every moment—shifting his heavy brogue, like a horse pawing—ready to cry—his lips falling into a sort of enormous pout—with a faint gleam of pleasure—was a piteous sight. Polly, of course, came to his assistance.

“To be sure, Tommy, dear, you’d like to go—wouldn’t you?”

To this appeal, in which was encouragement and support, Tommy with difficulty brought out a “I don’t know——”

“He don’t like company, does Tommy,” said the young lady, with a toss, and an amused look at young Mr. Henley. Polly then desperately took the matter into her own hands, and said, “Thank you so much, dear Mr. Godfrey, and Tommy will be sure to come,” then retreated, holding him faithfully by the hand.

It was a melancholy progress home, and it was hard to comfort him; for there was also a sense of deep abasement, and of having made such a mortifying figure; and there was, besides, this cruel neglect. But Polly could put on such an air of confidence and authority—could even put forth tones of *authoritative prophecy* that on the coming day all would be well, and the rival utterly eclipsed. “A forward, badly brought-up little monkey,” she pronounced him, with an affectation of severity; and taking a most hopeful view of the business, pronounced that it would be all right on that day, and that she knew that Fanny was only going on with some little tricks and airs, “just out of fun,” and to try him.

“My dear Tommy,” she said, “I assure you girls are very curious in that way, and very often they try and

annoy those they like best. I *know* that. And now, my dear, you will have your new jacket, and I will try and make you a nice new white waistcoat, and you will be quite smart and brilliant. Leave it to Sissy."

Such a gay prospect quite requited Tommy. The waistcoat gave a concrete shape to the happiness which before seemed almost impalpable and too remote. He grew comforted. An honest smile and rustic laugh came on his broad lips. Hope was before him.

At the Hall, the doctor had said, "Odd sort of boy that! quiet, heavy, and foolish."

"Ah, poor Tommy," the Squire said, compassionately. "Good honest lad. One of Madame French's admirers, you must know. *She's* been encouraging him."

The little lady tossed her head. "Oh, papa, what are you saying?"

"Ah," the Squire said, catching her and kissing her, "old pappy's the only admirer she has. He's to come before all the others— isn't he?"





CHAPTER IX.

THE CONTRACTOR.

WHEN Mr. Churchill came home from "being on town," and was taking his lunch off some little humble delicacy, the preparation of which, with the anxiety of preparation, had rather flushed our Polly's face, she came and told him the news.

"Coming down here!" said the clergyman, reflectively. "So that is the way? Quite proper."

"He's to be at the 'Speed the Plough;' and I think—or wouldn't you think, papa—if you called on him——"

"Oh, of course, of course," said the reverend gentleman, testily; "I know all that; I know the right thing to do. It is very easy to give directions in a simple thing like that—you ought to call here, and you ought to call there—such work!"

But the truth was Mr. Churchill was tremendously and secretly elated by this news. When his lunch was over he ordered his daughter up stairs. ("Do lay by those gewgaws and trimmings, and look after something sensible.

Try and clean up those children. We can't afford that genteel fancy work")—in order to have opportunity to reflect over the situation. He saw a splendid opening here. In a moment it all flashed on him. The great contractor built houses—built churches and glebe houses, of course—*very like a bishop's palace*, or repairs to a palace. Bishops would want time like other men :

"Mr. Burgess, if you wait for six months, and could put up the new conservatory in the mean time. I am really so much pressed with the decorators. Mrs. Brindley has led me into a world of expense."

"Well, my lord," replies Burgess, in his usual blunt way, "I tell you what I'll do. There's a son o' mine attached to a young girl, daughter of an excellent and clever clergyman—a man of the world, my lord, and a gentleman. I tell you what : give him the next parish, and you shall have time for the palace, and the greenhouse in for nothing."

The bishop was staggered (or he seemed to be, to the clergyman's prophetic vision). Brindley was notoriously greedy of money. He had been known to "ride" in an omnibus to save cab-hire. Everyone knew that.

"Upon my word," said the bishop, smiling (Mr. Churchill saw him smiling), "a very sporting offer."

"Is it a bargain, my lord?" said the contractor. "Say done, and give Churchill the berth. I am a plain man, my lord. You'll be doing no harm, for he is an accomplished, clever fellow, and by rights should be in London."

"I declare," the bishop said, dreamily, "I don't see

why not. There's old Nixon fumbling on at his duties—a scandal really to the diocese. I don't see why."

For nearly an hour Mr. Churchill listened to this pleasant conversation in his study. He had then another spectral interview with the contractor himself, in which his knowledge of the world completely fascinated that simple man of business. The rough son of toil became as a child in his hands. Then, having got through all this work, and being a little weary, he went out to walk, and inquired at the "Speed the Plough Inn" for the contractor. He found that gentleman was miles away tramping over the works, but would be home in the evening. A card was left—"The Reverend Mr. Churchill." He then returned, and was silent and abstracted. He filled with importance. It nearly *did seem* to him as though he had passed the morning listening to the bishop and the contractor making that little arrangement about the greenhouse. Those things required diplomacy, and were a serious strain on the mind. Polly did not venture to speak; she knew by old experience that some vast negotiation was in train.

He went out later to find Harry, and said to him carelessly,

"Bring him up here this evening; I shall be very glad to show him some attention."

But the contractor could not be induced to forsake the village inn or his "poipe" (so he called it), even when almost implored by his son, with whom it was a matter of vital interest.

"Oi've 'ad my go'd day's wark," he said, "and he's had

his'n, my lad; so Oi'l leave him to his rest, and he'll leave me to moin."

But the clergyman, when this news was brought to him very ruefully, had no notion of leaving him to his rest; and about half-past seven o'clock walked up to the "Speed the Plough Inn," where he entered boldly into the private sitting room of the contractor. In a shabby old shooting coat, with 't' poipe' beside him, that gentleman had been taking his nap, from which he was roused by Mr. Churchill's entrance. He stared at the intruder with blinking eyes, and called out with no good humour—

"What the devil d'ye want, mon?"

"Harry Burgess told me you were here. Very glad to see you, Sir. I am the clergyman of the parish.

"I want noa clergyman," said the contractor gruffly, "until Oi send for one. I don't want noa clergyman now, to come wakin' a mon up out of a snoog sleep. What d'ye want?" he added with sudden energy, "say't and be awf! I woan't gi'e ye a ha'penny! I never subscribes!"

"Hasn't Harry mentioned me to you?" said the clergyman, not in the least put out by this rudeness—he had met blunt bishops and archdeacons before now, and "put up with" their brusquerie—"me, his friend, Mr. Churchill, at whose house he is always welcome, running in and out like a dog, eh? Come, now, Mr. Burgess?"

"That's all very well, mon," said the other sulkily, and feeling he was hopelessly wide awake; "but ye didn't let him run in like a dog to rouse ye out of your arter-dinner

nap. Well, as you *are* here I am glad to see you, I suppose ; and ye may as well take that chair. Ye have a daughter, haven't ye ? ”

“ Oh, yes,” said the clergyman carelessly, “ several. I have a large family, Mr. Burgess,—and a hard thing it is to keep them ; as I dare say you know very well : bread and meat and drink are not to be got without money.”

“ 'Deed they're not,” said the contractor ; “ no man knows better than I do the value of every copper I've earned ; and if you'd tramped over nigh twenty moile of slush and mud as Oi done to-day you'd know too, and not wake a mon out of his sleep,—no offence to ye.”

“ Then I can tell you I know it quite as well. I assure you, tramping from end to end of a parish like this, on a beggarly hundred a year, represents a deal of walking, Mr. Burgess.”

“ Does it, now ? ” said the other, sarcastically.

“ Yes, it does, indeed. Ask your son what I go through ; he will tell you as an impartial witness ; he knows the wretched pauper-like payment they serve out to us. Nothing is to be got in the Church now but through a system of the meanest and vilest subserviency and intrigue, to which I disdain to lend myself. Your son seems a very proper young man, and I am sure will do well.”

“ May be so, may be so,” said the other carelessly.

“ Oh, I look on it as certain.”

“ Well, he must wark, as I warked. Devil a penny he'll get from me, if he's counting on *that*. I give him

what I give twenty other fellows of the same class. I've no money to give him, and dessay shan't."

"Shan't?" repeated Mr. Churchill, astonished. "No? But in fact I am glad to have this opportunity of speaking to you about him. He is always in our house, and I believe has some sort of fancy for my girl Polly."

"Well, I have no objection. Let every lad do as he likes; that's my way."

"And a very proper way——"

"Noa! ye'll not say that, when I tell ye he don't get nothing from me. He must wark his way, as I warked. I have noa money. It's all wark, and out in wark, and I mean him to wark. Whatever that brings him he's welcome to. A hundred a-year now, and to rise by gude hard wark, as Oi did."

"My dear Sir, you mistake. I am not thinking of that at all;" and, to do him justice, he was not. "I have no wish for your hard-earned money; God forbid. No, I think marriages of this sort between young people imprudent enough. There is always plenty of time; but God forbid I should interfere. Let your son have his £100 a-year, and my daughter her—er," here he cleared his throat; "her—absolutely nothing; but if they were bent on it, why—— No, I look at it in this way. I make terms with you. *You* love your son. Now it follows as a matter of course that as you go here and there and everywhere, you meet all sorts of people, of high and low—lords, and squires, and priests, and er—bishops. Am I right?"

"Oi, ye may say that; and noice kettle *they* are."

"Who, Mr. Burgess?"

"The beeshoops; nice holy lot."

"Now what I say is this," went on the clergyman, confidentially. "You meet all these squires with territorial influence; these bishops——"

"Oi, too many o' 'em by half."

"You, of course, have influence with them; your contracts give you *that*, of course. And now, Mr. Burgess, I shall put no obstacle in the way of these young people if you, on the first opportunity, apply for an adequate support for me from some of your friends."

"*What?*" said the contractor, pushing back his chair. "D'ye mean, *ask* them for anything?"

"Why, yes," said the clergyman, "that would be about the best way; and if you could——"

"Then I tell ye whoat, Misther Parson, I'd jest as soon hang myself. D'ye know what the principles of my loife have been? Never to ask anythin' o' any man, and I never will, if I were to go without my dinner a week. I never beg—never ha' begged, and never will beg, so long as I ha' breath. That's the way I made myself what I am, and that's the way I'll *keep* myself what I am. I've a contempt, so I have, for the fellow that begs; and I tell 'ee, Mr. Parson, I doan't think too much o' the man that proposes such a thing to *me*, Jack Burgess, that made himself by his own independence, and wants to keep independent. As for your girl and my boy, let 'em do as they like. If he's a fool, he'll marry her now—on his ninety pun' a-year, with a rise. If he's more sense, he'll wait ten year, when he'll have the rise.

So that's my answer to your proposals, Misther Parson."

Our clergyman was not to be offended by any plain-speaking or personality ; but he saw the inflamed face, the staring eyes of the angry contractor, who always grew excited in dwelling on his own independence.

"I am sorry you take this view," said Mr. Churchill, rising. "It is the regular thing ; the world would not go on without it."

"Because the warl's mean, Sir, and lick-spittish, and hasn't made its own money as I have, and am proud I have ; and I don't care who knows it, or who hears me. And I'll go to my dying bed, whether that be in a bed or a gravel pit, without having asked sixpence from any man. Those are poor creatures to moy mind, Misther, who spend their days begging this and that from every one !"

Thus dismissed, and with this reproof, Mr. Churchill came away with angry strides, chafing hard. "A mere low boor," he said, "without an idea : not so much as an idea. I always thought that fellow was a low creature, and now he shows what his extraction and breeding is. The girl has neither sense nor instinct, picking up such fellows. I am sick of the whole thing !" Polly was waiting at her work, and raised a face of glad inquiry to greet him as he entered.

"Well, papa dear," she said, "did you see him ?"

"Did I see him—did I do this—did I do that ? always questioning—questioning. Nice mess I am brought into always with your work. No one cares how I am mortified or what I have to go through."

The little green gate flapped to, and gave notice of some one coming. So Polly rose, and welcoming the diversion, said joyfully, "Post, papa."

"Some good news, of course. Of course I ought to like the post ; it is all very well for you, who get your fiddle-faddle letters from some nonsensical girl. Exactly."

"'IRNSTON SOLDIERS' AMELIORATION SOCIETY,' read the clergyman with infinite scorn : '*for providing for the wives and children of soldiers absent in war.*' Of course. 'Support earnestly requested. Public meeting in the Town Hall on Thursday. Clergymen of all denominations.' I'm a fine person to come to ! I can't afford to do anything of the kind. I've enough to do to ameliorate myself, I can tell you ; getting bread for so many idle mouths. Ameliorate yourselves, my good people." His eye mechanically read down the page with the same expression of disgust, which Polly of a sudden saw pass away, and give place to one of surprise and interest.

"CHAIR TO BE TAKEN BY THE
RIGHT REV. JOHN TALBOYS, LORD BISHOP OF
DUNMORE,"

was what he read. "Talboys to be there ?" he added, ruminating. "Oh ! come, let us see all this." Dunmore was the diocese that came very close to Cumberley. "Let us see this ;" and Mr. Churchill sat down leisurely to read the whole very carefully from beginning to end. "Benefactors of five pounds and upwards will be entitled to admission to the platform." "Oh, I must go to this."

"Five pounds, papa?" murmured Polly, a little alarmed and somewhat confounded at the sudden change in her parent's views.

"Well! what about five pounds?" said he, testily. "Now don't put me out." A flow of ideas and plans was rushing on his brain. From his own Bishop Brindley he had but poor hopes now. The man was a corrupt nepotist; but he had always looked fondly and wistfully towards Doctor Talboys, his diocese was so conveniently situated. "I almost regard that man as my own bishop," he often said. The story of Chewton, Dr. Talboys' present chaplain, was well known—"a little common curate," on sixty pounds a year, of a poor and distant parish. The bishop had met him in a railway carriage, had been lent a newspaper, had talked with him, been greatly amused by him, and had asked him to dine with him at his hotel; not very long after he had made him his chaplain, and had given him a very "good thing." The extraordinary accident of this sudden elevation had always been before our clergyman's eyes. It must be even said that for a long time after he took railway jaunts on the lines which curved about the bishop's town, in the hope of falling in with him, all to the serious diminution of Polly's little resources. But he was most unfortunate, and never reached to this beatific vision.

But here was a chance! The meeting was the common and natural ground: the broad centre of charity. Our poor and valiant soldiers, brave hearts fighting for us in the heats of India, leaving their wives and little ones behind to us. It was a small return surely. A common

ground. Charity levelled distinctions of rank, abolished reserve, rendered even introduction unnecessary. Pure strangers of different ranks could accost each other, the lowliest addressing the highest in the name of that sacred cause. But then, five pounds to the platform! Shame on those money-changers who could thus check the outpourings of charity. It was virtually a charge of admission reaching that amount. Still it was not an insurmountable difficulty with a clergyman—a clergyman of the Church of England—his card, his white tie would proclaim that. Such passed free everywhere. All theatres were open to every actor. There would be no difficulty about that; and with a lady with him nicely dressed—yes, he would bring Polly—if there was any difficulty at the barrier, the bishop, in the chair and having a commanding view, would motion and impatiently whisper, “Let that clergyman up.” At the end of the first portion of the proceedings, when they were reading the report, he would get a chair close to the bishop. He then stoops over and whispers, “Let me return, my Lord, my best thanks for your kindness. It is not the first instance of your lordship’s goodness that has travelled to us at Cumberley.”

“What! are you the clergyman of Cumberley? Churchill?”

“Yes, my Lord.”

“Dear me! So I have got you in my diocese, Mr. Churchill?”

“Yes, this day only;” Mr. Churchill smiled and bowed. “Virtually I always consider myself as under your lordship’s jurisdiction.”

“Ha ! ha ! very good. You know Cumberley ought from its geographical position to belong to me. Have you ever seen the palace? No? well, come over to-morrow and lunch. You may as well. Mrs. Talboys will be glad to know you.”

So have been the best, fastest, firmest of acquaintances arranged.

Mr. Churchill announced, at dinner, in high spirits, to Polly, that they should go to the meeting at Irnston ; and begged she would do herself up nicely and tidily, and look respectable. Polly was always glad of his expeditions,—it “took his thoughts off ;” and the rare honour of being taken with him quite overjoyed her.

“We will make a little party, dearest,” she said, “and spend a pleasant day together.” And she presently stole away to make suitable preparations, to be sure that Bridget should have ready one of the “fine” white ties, and have the best coat carefully brushed. It was like Trim going to buy the scarlet roquelaure.





CHAPTER X.

THE DINNER.

THE day of the dinner came round. It was not known, and was never likely to be known, how the faithful Polly sat up till the cheap American clock in the hall chimed two o'clock, busy finishing the white waistcoat which was to make Tommy splendid and accomplish the conquest.

The question had of course been raised, "Is 'that oaf Tommy' to go?" but the young lady bore down all opposition, and said "her father would be very angry if she came back unsuccessful."

Mr. Churchill had suitable reasons for conciliating the Squire.

The white waistcoat was finished; and Polly and her brother set out. There were no signs of heat or dust on this occasion. And his cheeks had been burnished up to a high state of rosy polish; the new jacket was on; and his collar confined by a fresh black ribbon. He was hopeful.

"Now, dear," said Polly, as they got to the gate, "I want to tell you—to give you a hint—you do very well always ; and I like your honest way, which, in the end, will tell more than any pertness or forwardness. But it is no harm just to—to—speak out and assert yourself, Tommy dear."

Tommy's face grew blank.

"It is easy to say that, Polly ; but if you don't know how——"

"You do very well, dear," said Polly, hastily ; "only a little nerve is what I want. Don't you see, a little nerve."

Dinner was to be at half-past five, a concession to the habits of the young ladies and gentlemen who were to assist, the Squire good-naturedly giving up his old "half-past seven, sharp," and making himself uncomfortable for the evening. When they entered the drawing-room they found the doctor, and his son and daughter. Madame French was up stairs at her toilet. The doctor had all but asked himself ; he found evening life, with that dreary woman at home, hang rather heavy, and seized every pretext for "going out." But the view of young Algernon sent almost a chill to the hearts of the two visitors. The elegance of his dress was not to be described ; a loose-fitting velvet frock, with knickerbockers to match, and violet stockings, and gilt buttons in his white waistcoat. Tommy, as he stared a little wildly at this splendour and taste, felt a sense of hopelessness on him, and had given up the battle at that moment. Mr. Algernon gave him a sort

of nod ; and then Tommy felt his sharp ferret-eyes boring into that white waistcoat which Polly had sat up till nearly two that morning to finish. It was not, certainly, of the finest "cut," though there was sound workmanship ; the fitting too betrayed the amateur tailorship.

"Well, you've come, young gentleman, after all—thought better of it? 'Pon my word," said the Squire, good-naturedly, "we *are* got up to-day, both gentlemen ; eh, doctor?"

"Algernon's dress," replied that clergyman, "is the same as young Pulteney's—tell about that, Algernon—Lord Lindon's son, you know."

"He said his papa," the young gentleman went on, smartly, "was ordering him a dress in London, from his own tailor, and he said why shouldn't I get one too, and to ask my governor. So I knew I was all right with *him*, and I said yes. And the two dresses came down together on the same day."

"He says you wouldn't know one from the other, Algernon tells me." The doctor was laid heavily back in a very soft arm-chair, smiling and licking his lips, and putting his fat long fingers together.

But now there was a rustle, and entered Miss Fanny, quite charming to behold, in a short white muslin frock, with a gold metal belt, a flower in her hair, and a locket about her neck.

Mr. Algernon rose to meet, and actually had the triumph of extorting a cry of delight from her ; for we must consider that this young creature had not yet been

trained to society, and found it only natural to express what she felt.

"Oh, *dear!*" cried Madame French, at the velvet and violet.

"I am glad you like it," said the young gentleman; "it's the same as Pulteney's. His governor, Lord Lindon, ordered it at his own tailor's, and they both came down together."

"Oh, how lovely!" she exclaimed, putting her little hand reverentially on the velvet.

Polly was afar off, talking confidentially with her friend, but her eye wandered over, and saw hapless Tommy moving his foot with his favourite pawing motion, and as yet unnoticed.

Madame French was eagerly pressing for a more minute history of the costume, when Tommy, recalling Polly's advice, stepped up, and with his great hand out, said desperately—

"How do you do, Miss Fanny?"

It gave her a start.

"You frightened me," she said, a little tartly. Then her eyes wandered over his dress, new to her; then turned to the glorified youth's beside her. The contrast was too evident; the *richness* of the last eclipsed everything; they never turned back again to the first dress.

"Now, here's dinner," said the Squire. "Doctor, take that young lady; Miss Polly, you are for the old fellow; and," here his eye twinkled, "what are we to do about the madame? It's a very awkward business, I declare. I don't know how we'll settle it."

Tommy was standing with bosom panting under Polly's vest, eyes starting out of his head, waiting. This would decide all. He believed what Polly said, that in her heart she was true, and at a great crisis like this would not fail.

A most coquettish embarrassment was coming into Madame French's face, when suddenly Mr. Algernon trips lightly forward, almost pushing past Tommy, puts out his velvet arm ready arched, and in a moment has the little muslin sleeve resting on it.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the doctor, "that man knows how to make his way. Ever see anything so cool?"

Every one else smiled. The Squire laughed loud. But Tommy, ready to put his knuckles to his own eyes, blurts out in an agony:

"It's not fair. She was to choose herself."

There was more smiling, and Madame French stood looking a little pained, and wondering at him.

"Never mind him," said Mr. Algernon. "What's the matter with him? Let us go down."

And so they did, and poor Tommy had to bring up the tail of the little procession.

It was a gay little party. The Squire was in great spirits, and infinitely amused with the airs of "my lad in velvet," as he called him. His good-natured compliments to Tommy did not reassure that youth, as when he said—

"Tommy won't mind not having a lady to take down. This is more in Tommy's line," touching the roast beef with his carving fork; "let me send you another cut,

Tommy. No? Ah, go 'long. D'ye recollect the breakfast we had together last year? I declare, now that it is past and gone, you astonished me."

They were all now looking at him as if he was a carnivorous being accustomed to prey upon food not natural to man; and in truth his red, full-blown cheeks, spreading like a monster tulip over his large white collars, and the way he was chewing his beef, more from agitation than from hunger or relish, made him not a little strange to look at. Madame French, Polly saw, had much the same view, and was laughing and giggling at the short pleasant remarks of the elegant gentleman beside her. Polly saw she could do nothing, and that the best way was not to interfere.

"I always like your sherry, Squire," said the doctor, holding up a glass of it, and pouring it into his mouth—not sipping it—at about every comma. "I know they would give worlds to have this at Formanton. I described it to 'em exactly, and he said, 'I know what you mean; I've been looking for it for years, but money can't buy that—money can't buy that.'" As he said this the doctor was all laid back luxuriously in his chair, with his hand resting on the foot of his wine glass. They were waiting for a course, and he was punctuating his speeches with many smacks and much relishing of what he had taken. "By the way, Chorley was over to-day—the dépôt is at Irnston, you know—with a very nice notion, really a very nice idea. He and Plumptre—Sir John's heir, you know—and Dacre, are getting up a play at the little town theatre. It's sure to be good. They're

nice fellows all, really as nice as you could meet. 'Mrs. Haller,' I think was what he said. By-the-bye, Algernon, your friend Ernest Euxton comes next week: his father told you he could let him come."

"On the fourteenth of the month," said his son, "and he can only stay a week, as Sir John is to send him to Rugby."

"One of Algernon's young friends," said the doctor, by way of explanation,—“nice gentlemanly young fellow as you'd wish to meet. I have always told Algernon to make friends; and I must say, in justice to him, he has always carried it out."

"Depends on the sort of friends," said the Squire. "There seems to me now to be only acquaintances; in my day we had friends."

"Well, you know that's the age—the age; and I declare I am glad to meet curry again. Algernon, tell about the charade you had, and Lady Euxton's writing the prologue."

Mr. Algernon seemed a most dutiful son, for he at once started amidst profound silence.

"Young Plumptre proposed it in the morning, and we got it up after dinner. I wore a Greek jacket all over gold; Lady Euxton brought it down herself: and Northcote acted and Miss Plumptre too."

"See that!" said the doctor, acting as showman at a panorama. "See that, they were tableaux, I think you said, Algernon, and got up in the nicest way—a blaze of gold and light? You know what tableaux are, my little lady?"

"Oh, no, no!" she said, as if in delight. "Tell me."

"Mr. Tommy yonder looks as if he did, though."

Public attention was thus concentrated on that unhappy youth, who stopped his chewing to look helplessly round.

"Come, Tommy?" called out the Squire, "look bright; sharpen up a bit, like a good lad! One, two, three! What is it?"

"I d-don't know," and he looked over to Polly, his faithful friend.

"He knows very well," she said, "if he only gets time to think. Don't you remember, dear, my reading it out for you from the newspaper?"

But Tommy recollected nothing then, and understood nothing.

"Tableaux," said young Mr. Algernon, "are plays, when you stand up and dress up for it, and the piano plays, with a curtain in front; that's a tableau."

"Oh," said little Madame French, "how beautiful! Papa, won't you give me a tabblelo?"

"To be sure, duck, whenever you like. Tell us more about 'em, Mr. Algernon."

Then that young gentleman—who was all the time taking his wine like a man—proceeded very glibly to give a rather confused account of the performance, in which the names of various high-born persons were brought in in a very illogical way; his father, however, was of great assistance.

"Tell about you and young Plumptre."

"They wanted a Roman in the death of Virginia, and

he said, 'Here's Henley will do as well as any one.' And so I did; and I dressed in his room, and he lent me a sword. His father has fourteen thousand a year."

"The best family in the county, Algernon; no one can deny that! And he said something of your going to him?"

"Yes, pa, if I was passing that way, he was sure they would be glad to see me. And, oh, the play after the charade! I was a newspaper boy, and called out '*Times! Times!* morning papers!' and all that!"

"Ah, ha!" said his father, "very good, very good! Why, you were quite a star, Algernon!"

"O Lord, that's nothing!" said the young gentleman.

Need we say that the eyes of Madame French—herself rustic enough—were filled with wonder and admiration at this liveliness, knowledge of the world, and powers of conversation.

All this time the battle was being lost for poor Tommy; and Polly, who herself never wanted for courage, interposed:

"Well," she said, smiling, "it is not so difficult, with all those fine clothes; and you have to say nothing in these tableaux, I believe?"

"Oh, of course not!" said the young gentleman, pertly. "That would spoil it all. Don't you know that?"

"But the speaking part is much more difficult. There was Tommy, who learnt the 'Battle of the Baltic,' and could say it standing out in the middle. The Squire here heard him."

"So I did. Now I recollect it all : and very well he did it. We'll have him on his legs after dinner."

"There's nothing so wonderful in that," said Mr. Algernon, a little spitefully. "Every boy at school is taught to do it. The fellows with us would be well whipped if they didn't."

The little lady laughed childishly at this notion, which in good truth, did not at all dispose of poor Tommy's claim to merit, who, glowing with anger at this depreciation and constant inferiority, came out with, roughly,

"I could spout it better than *you*."

"Oh, Tommy," said Polly, gently. The Squire laughed loud, and the doctor, looking over at Tommy with that air of dislike which he had always for him, said : "Well, that's a very confident speech ; and I suppose he is prepared to support his opinion by proof. What do you say, Sir?"

"I could do it as well as him," said Tommy, getting a sort of ungrammatical confidence, "any day."

"Possibly," said the doctor—"possibly. What do you think, Algernon?" he added, nodding to the right and left, as who should say, "See the difference, now."

"O Lord, pa, I don't boast. Doctor Whisher told us never to be bragging of what we can do, and——"

Tommy getting very bold and personal, now interrupted. Stooping forward, "Y—you know he couldn't; and he wants to get out of it; you know he does."

"I want to get out of nothing ; and I tell you what, pa, you know my speech in 'Douglas,' which Dr. Whisher

made me learn when Lady Tollemache came down? I know that, and will say it after dinner if the Squire wishes."

"Well done, Algernon ; most parliamentary, I declare."

But poor Tommy,—here was a fresh blow for him. It was vain to think of contending : he had a chill at his heart, and Madame French, unconscious of being ill-natured, was laughing in enjoyment of the whole.

When the ladies had gone up, and on this occasion some of the gentlemen went up with the ladies, it is to be feared to watch each other, the Squire said to the doctor :

"Did you ever see such fun? The two are as jealous of each other as a pair of Spaniards, and that little woman of mine knows it as well as a grown lady."

"Yes, very good ; oh, very good," said the doctor. "But did you watch Algernon? No clubman could do better, so cool and collected. The other is a good honest creature, but sadly unlicked. What he wants is a good knocking about at a public school. Do you know he reminds me of the father—the man here. The same sort of unreasoning—you understand me. I've not seen him for a long time ; in fact I make it a point to have as little to do with him as I can. I can't stand him ; I say it openly."

"Poor soul," said the Squire, ruminating, "we must think of the long tail of children he has after him."

"My dear Squire, that's all very well ; but if they plague him, he's not to plague us. I vow to you, Brindley the bishop has told me that he'd fly a hundred miles from the

sight of him or his letters. I believe there's not one of the bench he doesn't plague."

"Well, you know, between you and me, I am not too partial to Brindley; he's rather inclined to make what's called a hand of one. And I declare, Henley, I wish I could get him to do something for that poor Churchill; I mean to ask him one of these days. Help yourself; or shall we go up?"

When they entered the drawing-room, they found the two gentlemen sitting with the young lady; but it was plain Tommy had grown more bold. But unhappily this had only the air of impudence, and "want of breeding."

"That's a secret," Mr. Algernon was saying confidentially as they entered. "I'll tell you another time."

"Oh, tell me now—tell me now," said Madame French, leaping up and down in her spring chair in a very unladylike manner.

"I can't tell you before people," he said shortly, and looking direct at Tommy.

"I *wish* you'd go away, Mr. Tommy," she said sullenly; "you won't let us talk."

"But you don't want me to go: I know you don't. Why shouldn't I stay as well as he?"

"Because you are not wanted to stay. Every gentleman does what a lady tells. If Miss Godfrey wanted me to go, I should go at once. I shall go now if she tells me."

Madame French, with her pretty head on one side, and her dimply fingers behind her ear, was in smiling embarrassment:

"Oh, no ; you mustn't go," she said softly.

Doctor Henley and the Squire had seen something of this, and the former now struck in.

"Oh, but we have something else to do now. Mr. Tommy said he was a better man than Algernon ; and Algernon very modestly said he did not fear being put to the proof. Do you recollect that speech out of 'Douglas,' Algernon, that Lady Tollemache admired so?"

"Oh, yes, papa"—and Mr. Algernon at once stood up and went over into the middle of the room. In the light, it must be said the violet stockings and rich velvet looked to fatal advantage ; so it seemed to Tommy—wretched lad !—who felt that he was only ministering to another triumph for his rival ; and burst out with—

"I'll not do it ; I don't want to do it ; and—and it's not fair."

"But, my good friend," said the doctor, "you challenged him. Oh, I don't understand this. Go on, Algernon, my boy."

Algernon, with extraordinary glibness and fluency, and in a rather thin and monotonous voice, began—

"This is the place—the centre of the grove :
There stands the oak, the monarch of the wood."

And having finished the speech, went back to his chair, beside the little lady, with an unconcerned air.

"Bravo ! very well, indeed," cried the Squire. "Now, Tommy, to the front, and do your best."

"I c—c—can't," said Tommy ; "I've forgotten it."

"No, you haven't, Tommy dear; besides, I recollect it, and will put you in."

Tommy looked bright for a moment, and turned to her encouraging face; then looked over at Madame French, to whom Mr. Algernon was whispering with an amused air, while the foolish little person was tittering. That sight dashed his face again, and with swelling lips he walked over to the window.

"Odd lad," said the doctor—"curious lad."

"There, don't worry him, Miss Polly; you see he don't like it."





CHAPTER XI.

TOMMY BEATEN.

THAT unhappy night, meant to be one of pleasure, did not seem likely ever to have an end. It seemed to drag slowly on, though it went gaily enough by young Mr. Henley and the little lady of the house. At going away, Mr. Tommy came up and took her hand, with what Dr. Henley described afterwards as "quite a murdering air."

"Good-bye," he said, in a sort of thick utterance, which he, indeed, only meant for calmness and dignity.

She was all winning graces and yet had an air of alarm.

"Good-bye, Tommy; you'll come and see me again soon, won't you?"

"I don't know," said Tommy, bluntly, and all but choking. "You don't c—care——."

"My friend, my friend, what are you about?" said the doctor, who was at hand. "You are not speaking to the boys on the green, you know, now. This is the Lady

Paramount here. You were going to say something unbecoming, I am afraid."

Polly was very indignant at this unjust treatment of her pet, and had chafed under it all the evening. She thought it rather unworthy of a great doctor to be practising his wit, such as it was, on such an unequal object as a poor rustic boy overcome with shyness.

"Indeed he was not, Doctor Henley. If he had a fair chance, Tommy would do as well as any one—if he had the same opportunities, Doctor Henley; he has been all his life here, and has no school advantages; and I assure you is very clever when he gets the opening."

"There's a character for you," said the Squire, "and there's a sister. Well said, Miss Polly. Tommy shall have fair play another time."

The doctor did not reply, but began to puff through his lips—a motion with him always significant of irritation. Young Mr. Algernon kept looking at his rival from head to foot, specially keeping his eye on the home-made waistcoat, which certainly at this time of the evening was in a curious state of bagginess, and from imperfect tailoring had got drawn up sadly. The genuine curiosity and pity of this look was his most effectual engine of annoyance to Mr. Tommy. During the few moments of conversation the former had vouchsafed him "as one man to another," he had said,

"You get things made down here, I suppose?" and Tommy had answered bluntly,

"Yes, I do."

Then Mr. Algernon, turning to the admiring Madame French, said,

"My papa would not hear of my getting anything except from a tailor in London. I wouldn't put on anything that wasn't made in London."

"Oh, dear, yes," the young lady answered ; "papa gets me everything in London too. Oh, dear, yes." And both by a sort of instinct—children have no delicacy—fastened their eyes on Tommy's unhappy waistcoat. But now that evening of troubles—mental troubles—was at last to end for him ; and Polly said "good-bye," and took her brother away. Mr. Algernon remained behind. It was a dismal pilgrimage home.

"I'll never, never go there again," said the unhappy boy.

Mr. Churchill was in a very ill humour when his children returned that evening. He asked "who was there," and when Polly very reluctantly brought out the fact of the presence of the doctor, he grew very angry.

"I was not worth asking. That poor weak paudeen of a Squire is intimidated by him."

"But, dearest," said Polly, "I believe he forced himself in, or asked himself at the last moment."

"Oh, very fine," said the clergyman ; "those are the people that get on who can bring themselves to dirty their fingers with such meanness. His brat of a son was there too, I suppose ? He was ? Then of course we had a fine exhibition from that oaf there up stairs, who never opened his mouth. A fine exhibition, no doubt, disgracing me, and everyone laughing at me ; but it is always

the way. There's no one to help *me*; I must do everything for everyone. Tell me, Miss; will you speak out? What exhibition did this fellow make of himself? I *must* know!"

Polly was no diplomatist, and was but a poor hand at fence; and a good deal of the story was wrung from her unwilling lips. Then Mr. Churchill grew excited and bewailed his cruel fate, and then travelled away to the subject he loved — "That puffed-up, bloated man — that Henley. There's no greater worldling in the Establishment. No wonder the Dissenters are making their way, when a fellow like that is pushed forward. Now he's training up that little cur of his to cringe and toady like himself. And of course that fellow will get on too, like himself. No fear of that. Everyone gets on but my helpless lot. Go away now, and leave me. I have plenty to do, God knows."

So he had; if writing to the Lord Bishop of Sodor and Man and to Sir George Rumbold in his accustomed strain, were "doing." And with a sad heart, Polly withdrew, having with infinite difficulty saved Tommy from the horrors of a personal interview, when he would have been put to the question, and grown sulky and even defiant under ill treatment.

A morning or so later, the Squire's cheery voice was heard at the door calling up the stairs, like a hearty steward up a companionway. "Halloa! are you in?" he cried, beating the door with his stick. "Where's Miss Polly? I have news for her."

Mr. Churchill looked up eagerly from his writing.

"News?" he said; "what sort of news?" He assumed as of course that it had reference to some clerical matter, and to *his* clerical matter.

"'Pon my word, this is a very snug place," said the Squire, looking round. "Henley, the doctor, you know, says you must be uncommon comfortable here."

"Doctor Henley," said the clergyman, pinching his lips, "is so well established himself, he thinks we must all be as well off. This is a wretched place, Squire, though I dare say Doctor Henley thinks even his own comfortable cure not good enough. I have reason to know, Squire, that at this moment he is straining every nerve to get himself forward again. And what was he?—a common tutor, as I know well."

"Oh, come, Churchill, as for that, many of our bishops got on by schooling. I believe even Brindley himself."

At that name Mr. Churchill's ears quivered uneasily like a dog's.

"Oh, of Dr. Brindley we all hear nothing but good. A man that would do justice. I have always counted on your promise."

"Oh, yes," said the Squire, uneasily; "but you know I have hinted——"

"Polly told me what you said, and how you engaged yourself. The Squire has always held by what he has promised."

"Oh, of course—of course," said the Squire, a little testily. "That has been my character always; only I tell you Brindley, I think, is not very fond of me. No matter; here's Miss Polly—fresh and blooming. I have

come on pleasure bent, and with no frugal mind, I can tell you. You heard the other night about the military fellows and their play. Charley has a hand in it. And I tell you what—we'll make up a party, and go over and see them. And you can bring that poor fellow up stairs; he'll enjoy it, and give him another chance with my little coquette at home. Mr. Algernon gave him no fair play at all."

Mr. Churchill darted a look at Polly. "Oh, I dare say!"

"I declare it was as good as a comedy to see the two youngsters, just like grown men. That young Henley is uncommon shrewd, I must say; speaks like a little man of the world. Oh, that fellow will do, Sir."

The Squire did not see Polly's imploring look, and went on dwelling on young Henley's gifts and cleverness, with many a "No fear for that fellow—my lad is sure to make his own way," and such speeches.

Mr. Churchill drummed uneasily on the table with his thin fingers, while the Squire went on.

"We are going over in a strong party on Friday, and we must have Master Tommy—that's pos."

"Indeed I can do no such thing," said the clergyman, testily. "The boy mustn't be squandering his time in amusements while I have to slave my life out for the whole family. Indeed I can do no such thing, Squire."

"Then I can tell you you'll offend me if you don't. Now I make a point of it. Poor Tom had a very dull day of it the last time. Henley's clever young fellow

made all the running, and I want to give Tom a chance."

The Squire was so positive, and Mr. Churchill, though not in the best of humours, at last gave way, having his reasons for not opposing the Squire's whim.

Polly flew with this good news up stairs to her little rookery, where she had communicated it privately and with discretion to Tommy. He had been in a depressed moody state ever since, weighed down by the consciousness of failure and the hopelessness of struggle. The dazzling joys of the playhouse, the bliss ineffable of anything connected with the stage, which for children has a charm perhaps nearest akin of all known delights to the supernatural, brought the fresh colour to his cheeks. He was transported with joy, though perhaps inclined to deny himself, from a sense of resentment mainly, having no other object but himself. But Polly proceeded to paint in glowing colours other prospects incident to the expedition, not making what she felt was the mistake last time, of directly encouraging him to assert himself, which implied a failure previously. But assuming that such assertion would come as of course, and that he was certain, if he wished to defeat his enemy, such was not to be kept. There was presently a violent *émeute* above: frantic cries and indignant protest, at this unfair selection of Tommy, who became at once odious; and it required all Polly's tact and exertion to appease the tumult. But nothing more could be done: it was an enormous stretch obtaining permission for one.



CHAPTER XII.

"THE BRIGAND."

AT last the joyful day came round when the party was to go in to Irnston and see the officers' play. It was indeed a joyful occasion ; and it must be owned the superior attraction of the enchanting palace of delights had for Tommy a more infinite charm, and not a little took off his thoughts from the absorbing object of his passion. The memory of some provincial pantomime, not at all in those days competing with the metropolitan glories—seen, some two or three years ago, and alas ! no "treat" offered by parental fondness, but owing to a pure chance—kept glittering before his eyes. What, indeed, in the way of bright picture or mortal joy, approaches to that beatific vision !—and if religious instructors or preachers just so much as hinted to these tender hearts that the rewards of hereafter were to be after the pattern and quality which they had relished so exquisitely last Christmas, it might be a more effectual stimulant to a good life. The yellow light is as from

paradise. The fairies are yet more spiritual than fairies—not "Angles, but angels." Their golden suits seem to be part of themselves, their arms to be not material, but of some pink heavenly matter. The music comes floating down from open breaks in the heavens; the scenery is a glimpse of the eternal. This is the very oldest of stories, looked back to by the wisest with a wistful longing.

So was it with the children of the two houses. The days seemed to trail by very slowly, and at last the longed-for evening came round. Polly and her brother repaired to the Hall, where the party was to meet.

Mr. Churchill had not let them go without a bitter protest. "All his family amusing themselves, while their hack-horse had to stay at home and work out the money that was to pay for these fine junketings."

"But why, dearest, wouldn't you come yourself? There would be no harm in it; it is a mere amateur business."

"No harm in it! Oh no, of course not, to you! And if they saw me there, how many gossiping tongues would be ready to come cackling to Brindley or some of the bishops, and say how they had seen me in a playhouse. God help us, if we had to trust to your head for getting us on in the world!"

"But, dearest," said Polly, coming up close and putting her face down close to his; "you should amuse yourself a little, in your own way, and for your health. I am sure Doctor Henley will be going."

"I dare say," said Mr. Churchill, with animation; "I am sure he will be; he's no decency, that man. It's a

scandal if he's seen in a place of that sort, and he should be held up, and represented to his bishop. It's the presence of such men that has reduced the Church to the state it is in. It's intolerable, so it is. And I hope he will be exposed. Go on, now; don't stay and keep the Squire waiting."

Polly set off with her brother, who was even more splendid than on the last occasion. The same kind fingers had carefully "reduced" the swellings and inequalities in the white waistcoat; and the same anxious forethought had showed a little attention, which should give Tommy a splendid advantage to start with. She had provided a very handsome bouquet, made up by a friendly gardener for her, and she kept it as it were for herself, wisely determining not to mention it to Tommy until the last moment, when she would put it into his hand, and whisper to him to go forward and present it.

At the Squire's door they found two carriages waiting; at the window they saw heads, the pretty little Madame French nodding to them pleasantly, with the tall doctor rising behind, like a gloomy mountain in the background of a smiling village; and, alas! beside her the odious Mr. Algernon, more assured and satisfied with himself than ever. This gave both a little chill, and made Tommy's heavy lip drop. They went up stairs, and as they got to the door, Polly hastily whispered, "Tommy, dear, I tell you what, give her this bouquet when you go in; she will be so thankful, and it will be only a nice attention."

The Squire received them heartily. "Here we are, all ready, my dear; and here are the two big schoolboys, the doctor and myself, waiting to be taken to the play. 'For though on pleasure bent,' we must keep up the frugal mind, eh, doctor? Ah! just look at Madame French!"

The little lady was running forward to Miss Polly.

"What do you think of that turn-out? The rogue got it out of me, and I had to send to London for it."

She had indeed a very fine frock, with some gold worked into it; one of Madame Toulon's, a lady who dressed many of the nobility's children.

"And my friend Tommy there,—I see he is determined to do it to-night."

"Now, Tommy," whispered Polly. And with raging cheeks, and a voice changed into a thick croak, from agitation, Tommy suddenly put forward the bouquet, as if he was presenting a firearm, and thrust his present on her with a "I brought you over this."

The Squire smiled. The little lady drew back frightened, then took it doubtfully. "Oh, thank you; I am sure it is very nice."

"Well done, Tommy, my boy," said the Squire; "you're getting quite a lady's man."

Homage of any quality or from any quarter is always welcome to the gentle female heart. The little coquette turned to her other admirer:

"Oh, look at this—what he has brought me! Isn't it nice?"

The young gentleman was a rich bit of colour for that

night. There was the velvet suit, and the stockings were scarlet—*à la cardinale*—instead of violet.

"Now, Mr. Algernon, why didn't you think of that, eh?" asked the Squire.

"Oh, *I* wouldn't give flowers to any lady. I could if I liked—but no one did it at Euxton."

The doctor had his head on one side, listening with a smile.

"No having Algernon," he said. "We may depend on him for the right thing. Not but that this was very proper on Mr. Tommy's side, and he certainly brought a good-sized cauliflower when he was about it."

The little lady was looking with an embarrassed air at her present, as though she was now encumbered with a rather awkward obligation. Still there was the sense of the kindly "thought," which was an advantage for Tommy. "She had been presented with a bouquet by a gentleman," which was something to say if other "gentlemen" should ask her. Tommy, whose faculties were none of the most delicate, had got suddenly into great spirits. He felt he had started well.

"We have a good hour and a half's drive before us," said the Squire, "so we had better be going. I am very glad you are coming, doctor."

"Oh, dear, yes," said the doctor. "I should not go to a regular theatre for—er—any money" (the doctor meant any inducement); "but this is quite a different thing. Oh, dear, yes,—like a drawing-room, you know."

"To be sure," said the Squire. "Let us see. I have settled how we are to go."

They were down at the door, the little lady clapping her hands and crowing; Tommy's face beaming with delight, and even Mr. Algernon a little thrown off his centre by the prospect; for they were children still, and the tumultuous exultation of children going to the play broke through all the artificial training of even that youth.

"Doctor, you and I and Miss Henley and Miss Polly will go in the carriage, and my daughter and the young people in the other." And thus they set off.

It seemed a very long jaunt. The doctor and Squire talked pleasantly together. The doctor said he knew some of the young fellows in the regiment there, and was glad to see them amusing themselves innocently: better a million times than dicing and worse things. Many of them, he added, were nice, well-bred, well-born young fellows. There was the major of the regiment, whom he knew a little of, very nearly related to Talboys the bishop. He had met him at dinner, and found him a perfect man of the world, full of information, had travelled, and all that. "I assure you, yes," said Doctor Henley.

The Squire received this information with the good-natured surprise required, as though he had been under the impression hitherto that Major Grainger had been a very ignorant, boorish man. So indeed do we often receive such pieces of news; and so indeed is conversation helped on.

In the other carriage was a very merry party, and Mr. Algernon was very amusing indeed, telling anecdotes of Euxton; quite, however, overlooking Tommy. The

latter, however, naturally of a silent turn, was secretly enjoying his fresh triumph about the bouquet, and was content to listen.

Ah ! here were the darkness and lights of Irnston, at last. Here was the clattering pavement, and the crowds in the street, who all, as our young people supposed, must be going to the play-house. The little lady was half rising up to look as every light flashed into the window.

"Here it is ! This is it !" she was breaking out with, her little hands clapping. There at last it was ; for they had stopped. No, it was the end of a "line," and it was a sore and tedious trial, and so long that even Mr. Algernon's anxiety and agitation began to be apparent, and all his worldly training gave way.

Now they have pulled up at a wide cave, that seems absolutely blazing with fire, so resplendent is the effect, and against whose entrance, one at each side, repose two mighty and gorgeous boards, flaming too with crimson letters, tall as Madame French herself, and which indeed, in their way, are as magnificent as scenes themselves. People are standing about. The little lady gets down, and reads in rapture the crimson letters of the play-house—the rest is dim—

THE BRIGAND !!

Alessandro Masseroni . . Capt. Macpherson.

Then they went up the illuminated stair, with magical persons connected with the theatre standing about. Had the clergyman of the following Sunday, while dwelling on

Jacob's ladder, said that it seemed to his eyes about as gorgeous as the stairs of a theatre, the little lady would have fancied she had a very complete idea of his scriptural narrative. They spoke respectfully to the Squire, and led the way into a crimson circular gallery, full of doors with little holes filled with glass. They stopped before one. There was a clicking, and it opened. They were awe-struck. Then the Squire said,

"Now, young ladies and gentlemen, go down to the front."

The bare glimpse was dazzling, overpowering. They stopped irresolute. For a marvel, a sudden inspiration came to Tommy, and perhaps an interested instinct concurred. He went forward, led the way, and plunged boldly down to the front. Then came the little lady and Miss Godfrey; but by her arrangement Tommy was seated next the object of his adoration. She was so delighted she did not miss her other admirer.

"Oh, how delightful!" she said in a low voice. "It is heaven! Oh, Tommy, what a sight!"

"Oh, splendid!" said Tommy.

Mr. Algernon was only behind. Miss Godfrey all but insisted he should take her place; but he refused with an air of indifference. That lubberly boy was in front of him.

The little lady turned to him with the most languid air of invitation in the world and said—

"I am afraid you don't see?"

"Oh, perfectly," said the other. "But where are the flowers?"

Where, indeed ?

She looked down confused. Had she forgotten them, or left them in the carriage?—or dropped them out of the window?—as the Squire said the next morning, with great glee : “I saw the rogue didn’t like the bouquet—once she heard it wasn’t fashionable to have one.”

“Oh, Fanny !” said her sister, “what a shame for you to lose the beautiful flowers !”

Tommy’s face was swelling, but he said nothing.

Indeed the sight of that gorgeous house all glittering, the people, the mayor in all his glory sitting in the centre, the officers in scarlet, the soldiers in the gallery, the ladies in their hair, — was, indeed, overpowering as a spectacle.

Little Madame French looked on with awe, and at the same time with an undefined feeling. She had her bill, which seemed a celestial document—angelic characters. She had also discovered, pinned to the seat, a little printed ticket, with their names and number and the name of the gentleman who had escorted them, opened the door, and received civilities of a strictly private nature from the Squire :

MR. CHEAR . . . BOX-KEEPER.

The little lady spelled it out, and, looking round to Polly, exclaimed with delight—

“Oh, Mr. Chear, Mr. Chear, you are a cheer to me !” —a sentiment that delighted the Squire, and was often repeated by him.



CHAPTER XIII.

A NIGHT OF GLORY.

DOCTOR HENLEY was far back (the boxes were, indeed, small enough), and suddenly whispered to the Squire—

“I see Major Grainger. He is down in front; actually in the next box, close to Miss Churchill.”

And following out the curious principle in human nature before alluded to, the Squire looked eagerly to see, and was greatly interested at seeing a tall, cold-looking, baldish officer, in a cavalry uniform, who was in the box within one of Polly, sitting up very straight and stiff, and looking apparently by himself and without a party.

“Dear me,” said the Squire; “yes, I see. So that is he?”

The house was now full. The band in the orchestra struck up—the band of the Fifteenth Carabiniers, under the leadership of Tückermann. The bill was before them. It was indeed to be ‘The Brigand’—a most stirring play, for which it went about Captain Mac-

pherson had come all the way from Glasgow to play Masseroni.

But first a prologue by Captain Whittle, delivered with excellent good humour and glibness, in which there were allusions to "your bright eyes," and winding up with—

"And all mankind one certain motive draws :
Be but indulgent—lend us your applause."

It was all in the *Irnstone Mercury* the next morning, and read very well. But now the play ; and Madame French leaning forward, absorbed as the curtain rolls up, gives a crow of delight as the beauties of the first scene display themselves. How gorgeous the dresses—those dear, beautiful, gallant men, the bandits, and Maria, the bandit's wife or sweetheart, and the peaked hats and silver tassels ! And the noble and too fascinating Captain Macpherson, more gorgeous still than any of the others, with his rifle over his shoulder—how splendidly he declaimed !—how gallant and defiant he was !—quite overcoming even the little difficulty of a rather marked Scottish accent. They never perceived it. How she all but shrieked, and covered up her eyes as the firing began ! Too seductive night ! to be often talked of and looked back to afterwards.

To Polly it was all new. She had been only once within a theatre in her life ; and it was all an exquisite novelty also. She, too, felt inclined to applaud, and followed the fortunes of the Bandit Masseroni with breathless interest. And how soft and pretty came the music—"Lo ! morn is breaking"—skilfully directed by

Herr Tückermann, and the tripping Gentle Zitella air sung by the gallant Macpherson to a guitar in a rollicking and irresistible way. It was when this lyric was rapturously being encored, and everybody was delighted,—Polly had to play it many a time at their consumptive spinnet at home,—that she found the dark cold officer with the high forehead was not thinking of Zitella, or of the gallant Macpherson ; but she felt was gazing steadily at her—not with disrespect, but with an interest, so that she could hardly be offended. She wondered not a little at this persistence, though she had not heard the doctor's remarks, or seen his eager pointings out to the Squire. But presently, the gentleman turned away slowly when she looked, and as the play interested her, she ceased to think of the matter.

It was said in the military circles about the theatre that Macpherson exalted himself on this occasion, and was far beyond any of his professional "fellows." Mrs. Alymer and Miss Annie Walker, who were part of the regular company, assisted the gentlemen, and as the *Mercury* said, "were all that could be desired." Not so much could be said for young Mr. Pilpay, the junior cornet of the Carabiniers, who played a lover in a very tight blue and silver hussar dress and hessians, and whose declarations of affection, accompanied with a sudden marionette motion of the arms and rigid stiffness of the limbs, he pressing his suit with the strangest impassiveness, used to cause a wave of tittering to float round the house. Audiences at such amateur performances are in singularly pleasant vein ; and when

another gentleman — Captain Bull — gave a simple message with a surprising soldierly defiance and passion, it was not surprising that the audience should have burst into ironical applause. But even the great Macpherson was the victim of this humour at one critical part of the drama.

It was drawing to the close ; Madame French's little face was bent wistfully forward, her chin reposing on her small hand, and a sense of oppression at her gentle heart. Her two admirers had forgotten their animosities, and it was an exciting moment ; for the gallant Masseroni, who had always generous impulses and the instincts of a gentleman, having found his way into the prince's house which he and his band were to rob, had strayed into a drawing-room where there was a lady's picture. All was still ; the prince and his household at rest. It was curious to see the bandit alone in that boudoir, taking up in a gentlemanly way the various ornaments on the table, his face overcast with gentle reflections. What thoughts were in his mind as he looked round, and then raised his eyes to the picture, started back, and exclaimed—

" 'Tis my mother ! "

There was nothing burlesque in his tone or delivery, there was nothing burlesque in the notion ; why should he not be of as high birth as he looked ? Yet, after a pause, there came a roar of irreverent laughter, which continued many moments, and quite disconcerted the captain.

Polly could not help smiling. But the officer who was close to her looked on grimly, without moving a muscle.

And Madame French, with a face of almost painful interest, looked round with wonder and grief. What were they laughing at? Surely, she thought, he did look like a born prince.

And oh, when the house was roused, and the soldiers came and fired through the sliding panel, and the unhappy Alessandro was carried in and laid down on his own father's floor, and died, affectingly forgiving all, Polly saw there was something like a tear in Madame's eyes.

"Oh, it was dreadful!" said Miss Fanny, with immense relief, as the curtain came slowly down. Beautiful play—charming story! the figures wherein were long to float in their childish dreams.

Then broke out the chatter of delight, and voluble talk. Which did they like best—who was their favourite? Oh, she liked—her face moving on one side and her fingers twisting the bill—that splendid Alessandro. In truth she already felt a soreness in her gentle little heart, and that hero had completely effaced the images there of her two junior admirers. They seemed unutterably prosy and insipid. They wore no velvet hats; they were not shot; and could not die so sweetly and so beautifully.

"Come, young gentlemen," called the Squire, "come out and have something to eat and some lemonade."

Tommy jumped up with alacrity, his large good-natured mouth distending in anticipation.

When he had climbed over the bench Mr. Algernon said, coolly, "No, thanks, Squire. I don't take anything between meals."

Tommy just looked back, and ruefully, but too late, saw his rival coolly stepping into his place beside her. That thought made the lemonade bitter. The bun was turned to ashes in his mouth. He was eager to be back.

"What's over the lad?" thought the Squire. "I believe he is an ungracious lout, as the doctor says."

Tommy floundered down to the front. There was Mr. Algernon busy with Madame French, who was gradually recovering her spirits.

"I say," said Tommy, with a roughness that arose only from agitation, "you must go out of my place."

The other looked back coolly and made no reply.

Tommy glowing at this insult, touched him on the back, and said, more roughly, "You must come out; and you know it is my place."

The little lady looked round displeased. Tommy seemed to her then like some low countryman, anything but a bandit. "Dear me," she said, "what do you mean?"

"Tommy! Tommy!" said the gentle voice of Polly, interposing, "be reasonable: you have sat in front long enough; now you must let Mr. Henley see."

"Oh Lord! I don't care about that," said the young gentleman. "I'd have given up if he'd asked me civilly. But *must* isn't a word for a gentleman. I shan't move—unless," he added suddenly to Miss Fanny, "you tell me. I'll go for you."

Tommy's great eyes were turned in agony on her. She could save him from humiliation. But she only looked from one to the other in pleasant embarrassment.

Hush ! here was the farce beginning, and Captain Whittle, the excruciatingly comic man of the regiment, in his great part of Jerry Bumps, in "Turning the Tables."

It was all over for the unhappy Tommy.

During this interval the doctor had struggled down to the officer in the next box, and with a kind of half-obsequious half-patronising air, and hand extended, had said, "I have—pleasure—of knowing something about Major Grainger—the bishop, and——"

The other waited coldly, with his eye fixed on him, and did not help him out in the least.

"You must have heard my name, I know, from him—Doctor Henley, the Vicar. This is my daughter ; Christina, my dear, let me—Major Grainger."

And having pressed this point, and made an observation or two in this key, "Nice—very nice—to see soldiers amusing themselves in this innocent way, I declare it is," he withdrew back to his place, having thus happily provided for his daughter.

But though that young lady did her best—her insipid best—to win the grim major, he seemed to resent the whole proceeding as one might an intrusion into his private study ; and answering very shortly, rose presently and went away. She was never partial to Polly, and her instinct had seen his looks implied preference to her ; indeed the whole play was insipid and tedious enough. Her drama was that of life—the talk of real men and women ; and her feelings were therefore scarcely friendly to Miss Churchill.

But to the latter the jests of Captain Whittle were indeed convulsing.

She was heartily amused, and was guilty of the ill-breeding of almost distressing laughter. The audience, too, could now laugh at what was not burlesque, and where this merriment came most welcome. The little Madame French quite forgot her romantic memories of the dying bandit who had been so snatched away, and hung down her head in a sort of hysterical agony. Only Tommy remained stolid—his wrongs were too deep—he did not even listen; for a new desire had entered into his soul—the thirst for vengeance. He could bide his time.

There—the play was over; Captain Whittle had been called out to receive a well-deserved compliment; the mayor was rising to go away. It was over, and heaven had passed away—alas! so it seemed to Madame French. To some stout persons about seven times her age, and stretching their limbs, much cramped in the narrow benches, it came as a relief. Every one was trooping out—crowding down the stairs. They were putting out the lamps already. All was indeed over. Now for the drive home.

What voluble and enthusiastic talk! except from Tommy, not to be soothed out of his resentment. Once Mr. Algernon spoke to him and he did not answer.

“What’s over you?” asked the Squire again. “My good lad, something seems to have gone wrong with you.”

"Oh, he's sulky because I took his place. I don't care, I'm sure."

"You daren't do it anywhere else!" said Tommy, suddenly flaming out, "or I'd——"

"Hush, Sir," said the Squire, now angry, "you're a bold boy. Such a thing to put you in a bad humour when everybody is amused and trying to amuse you. Come, I won't have it, Mr. Tommy; so come, make up, and give Algernon your hand."

"I am quite willing, I am sure," said the latter young gentleman.

Tommy, morose, injured, and yet ready to cry; defiant, and wishing for a clear stage there and then to right himself, had to endure the humiliation of having his hand violently forced into that of his rival. But it was a hollow reconciliation. All were so happy and eager talking over the night, that he was considered a sort of kill-joy and disturber.

No wonder the Squire said to his daughter, "Very odd lad, that; I am afraid a little ill-conditioned."





CHAPTER XIV.

RETRIBUTION AT LAST.

EVEN for Polly the dazzling glories of that night had a fascination, and in her dreams too the lights and colours came back very sweetly, and flitted before her. With day she was back again into prose once more, and in the cold practical round of household duties. Yet that night became a treasure for her—a memory with which she often stole away to the golden casket of other soft memories, and they were few enough, to feast her eyes with for a few seconds. Such little feasts to one whose life is a dull round, have a value beyond the moment, and looking back through the haze of a long life at such a night of enjoyment becomes a pastime and a comfort. But she had other duties. She had to attend her father on his expedition. It was noted, however, that a marked change had come over Tommy. He did not for the next few days revel in details of the night's joys, as his companions did. He did not set to work and join in converting the nursery into a workshop,

where "The Brigand," with all the accessories, properties, &c., might be reconstructed. He kept apart, communing with himself. He did not like the subject, and kept apart brooding over his mortification. It was evidently charged with no pleasant memories for him. Polly saw all this with deep distress, and gently respected his sorrow. After awhile she missed him, and suspected he had gone out to seek companionship among the trees and flowers like other older lovers.

The Squire was walking down his lawn after his hearty lunch, when he was a little surprised at seeing Tommy advancing up to meet him. This sort of morning visit was wholly unprecedented, and never occurred before. But the Squire did not know that Tommy had been lying in ambuscade for nearly an hour waiting for his coming, so that they might meet accidentally. "Hallo, my lad, coming to pay us a visit? Sorry I can't go back with you, but you'll find her—the little Madam—at home, eh!" and the Squire winked.

Tommy coloured violently. "It's not that; I don't want to go in. But would you tell me, Squire, something?" and Tommy moved his cap, and scraped the gravel with his foot.

"What is it, my man? Out with it."

"When is he, I mean that Henley, going away?"

"Oh, that's it!" and the Squire laughed. "Well, I believe in a few days. Why? But if you'll go up now, you'll find him there. My little rogue is humbugging him, I believe. I don't think she likes him, you know Mr. Tommy, but she wishes to amuse herself. Go

up, and they'll tell you all about it," and the Squire walked away down to his farm. But Tommy did not go up, but went back into ambuscade. He waited very patiently for half an hour, then for another, then for a third, with agony at his heart. Their dinner hour was gone by, but he did not care. At last he heard a sound: he peeped out through the leaves, and saw Mr. Algernon on the doorsteps careless and gay, but waiting at the door for some one to come out. With burning cheeks he could have told who that was; and in a moment or two forth came Madame French equipped for a walk, in a blue cloak and a shepherdess' straw hat, and, it must be said, looking most bewitching. Then the two set forward together down the avenue. The affair had advanced leagues since last night—that was plain even to Tommy's dull but honest eyes. But daggers were passing slowly through and through his heart. They came down nearer and nearer, the little lady putting her head on one side and listening with a smile to the airy nothings addressed to her.

With compressed lips and breath held fast, Tommy waited until they had passed by. It was a great struggle, and he was near bursting out. Then he followed cautiously, still keeping within the bushes. He saw him beating the flowers with an absurd little cane, talking flippantly about himself with a great many "I, I's," the lady listening with a very pleased air. They took the road to the garden, Tommy still following.

In the garden they stopped on a grass plot and talked a long time, when suddenly a footman came running

from the house with word that Miss Fanny was wanted for a moment.

She turned to her admirer with a most inviting smile ;
"You will wait here for me, won't you?"

"All right," the young gentleman said, carelessly.
"Don't be long, though."

"You won't go away?" she said, running back to him.

"Not I," he answered. "I tell you what; I'll get the gardener to give me a peach."

The little lady clapped her hands, and crowed with delight.

"You get one for me, too," she said; then cantered away.

Tommy waited a moment, then bounded out, very much heated and inflamed besides with contending passions. He stood before the confounded Mr. Algernon.

"No, you'll get no peach," said he, with a trembling voice, "as yet, till you've settled with me, Henley. What did you mean by insulting me last night? or what do you mean altogether? I'll not bear it, I tell you. So look out, and fight me fair now."

Tommy had grown eloquent of a sudden. Mr. Algernon, amazed, looked back helplessly, and could not find words to reply.

"Oh, you'll get no help from her," said Tommy bounding round, so as to intercept the view, and squaring fearfully. "Come on at once and fight, if you've any pluck."

"I'll not fight," said the other, pertly; "I did nothing to you."

"Yes, you did!" roared Tommy; "you're a coward, too, I see."

The white cheeks of Mr. Algernon coloured a little.

"I'll tell papa of your rudeness," he said, "and he'll make your father flog you for this."

"You will, will you?" said Tommy, coming up close, and hitting him a sound blow on the chest. "Then take that, and stand up to me if you dare."

Mr. Algernon turned very pale, and looked round again; but there was no help coming. The garden was deserted.

"Come," said Tommy, with grim humour, "there's no help for it unless you run; and if you don't hit me at once, I'll knock you down."

"It's cruel, unfair, low," began Mr. Algernon, on the high road to blundering, "and you are a low-born——"

This speech was cut short by a ringing blow on the side of the cheek which made the young gentleman stagger. He struck out himself a little wildly when Tommy hit the companion stroke on the other side of the cheek. This was too much. With a loud cry, he turned and fled—fled towards the garden gate—where, alas! Madame French and Polly were just entering. Tommy, in his eagerness, did not see them; he was thirsting for punishment on his enemy. In a moment he had caught him.

"Ah! you coward! so you run away, do you? You can talk very bold before Polly and her; but I'll give you a lesson now."

Mr. Algernon was still flying, screaming too, and

Tommy was pursuing, with his hand on his collar. Polly gave a cry.

"Oh! Tommy, Tommy, what are you doing?"

The little lady was pale with terror. Indeed Tommy, what with his heat and colour, was a dreadful fellow to look at, and had attained quite a new and heroic air from his gallantry. Both stopped; both combatants were overcome with confusion, but from different causes.

"For shame!" said Polly; "this is very wrong of you both. Tommy, I didn't expect it from you."

"It *is* a shame," said Mr. Algernon, collecting his wits again, and settling his collar, which had been disarranged by his enemy. "I was doing nothing to him, and he attacked me when I wasn't looking. He wouldn't give me time to defend myself."

Tommy, forgetting the presence of ladies, raised his arm, and Mr. Algernon confuted his own statement by his own motion. Polly smiled. Madame French was looking at him, not with interest. Tommy's prowess and chivalry had made an impression on her changeful little heart. Mr. Algernon saw this impression perfectly.

"I shall just tell my papa about it, and he'll take it out of his papa."

"You malicious, dishonourable little fellow!" said Polly; "you have no spirit. We saw the way you were running away. If you take my advice you'll not say a word about it to anyone, and Tommy here shall promise not to do the same; won't you, Tommy dear?"

"I don't care, I'm sure. Do what you like, Polly,"

said Tommy. "As for *him*, he's not worth a thrashing," and he lifted his arm.

"Don't, don't, Tommy," said the little lady, eagerly. "Don't mind him ; let him go away."

Young Mr. Algernon gave her a look, picked up his cane, which he had lost in the *mêlée*, settled the collar of his coat, and walked away with a "You'll hear more of this !"

All looked after him. Even then Tommy admired the coolness with which he carried it off.

"You are not hurt, Mr. Tommy?" said the young lady, anxiously, and with a soft manner of interest that was quite new to Tommy.

"Not I," said the latter, with a sort of heroic bluntness new to him also.

Then, on invitation, he told the story ; certainly with no affectation of modesty on his own side.

"I couldn't stand him any longer," said Tommy ; "and after last night, the sooner it came to this the better."

From that hour was Tommy rehabilitated. Polly's advice was not taken. So important an affair could not, of course, be kept secret, and it soon travelled to the Squire's ears, who was delighted with the whole.

"What delights me," he said, "is that little jade there. There's the world for you ! She's quite given up the other, and going over to the hero."

Young Mr. Algernon did not stay longer, and in a day or two went back to his school.



CHAPTER XV.

A NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

WITH the morning they set out for Irnston. Polly was charming in a pink bonnet of the pretty pattern common before the days when a ribbon or strap was laid on the head and tied under the chin. Her father was rather bored by her society ; though she was allowed to lean on his arm. His mind was travelling away to the interior of the palace, and to bishops' "ladies," even his lips were moving, making replies to the good-natured speeches of the kindly bishop. She nestled close to him, and looked up into his face now and again, with an infinite love and interest. In the train she sat silent while he read his newspaper, but she had entertainment enough in looking from the windows on the pretty country they were flying through. Then came the chimneys—videttes of the huge manufacturing town—which grew into parties and clusters. Finally they reached the great town itself, and went up straight to the meeting.

It was just beginning ; a great crowd was gathered

about the door, and many were going in. Their train had been a little late, to Mr. Churchill's serious agitation, who seemed inclined to rest the fault on the head of his gentle daughter. There was an excitement—a crowd about the doors of the meeting. Mr. Churchill noticed with something like pain an undue number of clergymen hurrying in.

"Of course," he thought, scornfully, "no bell-wether like a bishop."

The "body" of the hall was free, of course, and he went in. It was crowded—a sea of faces—and afar off he saw a sort of inclined plane of more glorious and glorified company—the platform. In this direction he made his way, dragging his daughter along.

The bishop was in the middle, in the chair, the gold edge of which came at his head behind; like the halo of a saint in a lady's illumination. The Honourable Mr. Humber, son of Lord Ventnor, was speaking. The stewards were at the little entry which led up to the platform: they had wands and made motions to the clergyman to move quietly. Indeed, everyone was looking round at the intruders; and Polly felt very nervous, and in a flutter, with a sort of presentiment that all would not go well with her father.

"You know we have no ticket, dearest," she said; "they will not let us in. Let us go back, and sit down here."

Mr. Churchill took no notice.

"Ticket, please," said the steward; "subscriber's parish ticket. Make no noise, please."

"I am a clergyman of the Church of England," said Mr. Churchill.

"Ticket, please," said the steward, blandly; "we can't let you in without one. Must go back, then."

"I understood," said the persevering clergyman, "that all clergymen—I am the Rev. Mr. Churchill, of Cumberland, if you will take my card—here it is—to his lordship, or to Sir Thomas there."

"Oh, nonsense," said the steward; "impossible; you must have a ticket, and I must really beg you to go back—you are preventing people behind from seeing or hearing. You shouldn't have come up here at all. Policeman, show this gentleman to a seat."

How Polly's cheeks flushed at this treatment of her father, whose mortified and disappointed face struck a chill to her heart. She stooped forward and spoke:

"Oh, Sir, you will let us in, or let my father in. I can sit here; but he has a reason for it. We thought we would be admitted as a matter of course. Please do not, Sir; we have come a long way!"

The steward looked at her with interest.

"Really, Miss, it is impossible; we have our directions. It is the only way to get money for the charity, and——"

At this moment, when all hope seemed fled, a tall gentleman, with a high forehead, and a very black beard, and large eyes, stepped slowly forward, and asked could he do anything for her.

She recollected him at once.

"It is outrageous," said the reverend gentleman, hotly;

"these policemen are losing all discretion. They don't know how to treat gentlemen. You are witness, Sir, to their behaviour?"

"I thought you spoke," said the gentleman, still to Polly, "of some friend on the platform? I will take your message to him, if you wish."

Polly coloured and cast down her eyes in great grief and confusion, for she knew that this might only bring fresh mortification, and the "Sir John" affront them with a public neglect. Her father was so sanguine, and built such fabrics on little or no foundation, that she could have cried almost then and there.

The gentleman saw all this in her face; for he was looking at her intently; and then said, coldly:

"The best way will be to lose no time, and come at once with me. I am one of the stewards."

He was in authority; they were allowed to pass; and fuming and blowing Mr. Churchill thus made his entrance on to the platform, getting as near as he could to Sir John and the bishop.

Alas! it is on record that Sir John all but snubbed him publicly, saying haughtily to a hunting friend that here was that "begging parson again," as the reverend gentleman—the Hon. Mr. Humber having now finished—made his way to him, with an obsequious smile, dragging Polly behind.

Their friend stood by them for a time stiffly and grimly. Mr. Churchill, after his first rebuff, now taking note of him. A person of influence, and perhaps distinction—this seemed almost as of course. He turned in his chair,

and screwed round his neck,—a sort of invitation to draw near, stoop down, and listen. The other merely stared impatiently, merely bending his head a little.

“I am so much indebted to you, Sir; it was very thoughtful of you indeed. Only for these bad arrangements and our coming late——”

“Of course, of course,” said the other, impatiently. “You need say nothing about it. There is no compliment in the world.”

“That is your modesty, Sir——”

“Hush, please! We are interrupting;” and he turned away to cut the matter short.

Polly suddenly felt her father’s arm tremble in hers, and heard him “scrape” the floor with sudden impatience—signs she knew the meaning of tolerably well. She looked at his face—saw that it was sour and pinched; and, following the direction of his eyes, made out the figure of worthy Doctor Henley, seated quite close to the bishop.

He had an air of complacent proprietorship, as who should say, “I have vested rights in this dignitary which there is no need for me to assert—they assert themselves.”

This dreadful spectacle was too much for Mr. Churchill.

The bishop was now speaking—the learned and pious Doctor Talboys—very soft and silvery, very plaintive and small, at the end of every sentence letting his voice fade off, as it were, into a faint cadence, which only those near him caught and endorsed with applause, which

was taken up by the meeting below, who knew that some point had been made, which it was only proper should be applauded. Encouraged by this, and as though he was making an impression at the very far end of the hall, the bishop went on at great length, growing more and more conversational every moment, and at last sat down. Soon the meeting and speaking was over. The platform broke up. Everyone looked half smiling and bending towards the bishop and the distinguished persons, who began to move away slowly out ; the bishop with stooped air of unobtrusiveness, common in persons of importance, and rendered more conspicuous by the obsequious drawing back and making way of those about them. Mr. Churchill had pushed into the front rank, yearning for some sort of introduction, yet desperate.

Sir Thomas, it was plain, was hopeless, would do nothing. Why, what was this? Oh! that was too much. There was the tall, portly Doctor Henley walking beside his lordship, talking unctuously and smiling as he talked, still with the air of proprietorship. The spectacle quite confused Mr. Churchill. Now the bishop was passing him ; all he could do was to break into incoherent praises to his daughter, though he neither saw nor thought of her at that moment.

“How eloquently his lordship put it. I never heard anything finer. Doctor Talboys is the clearest speaker I ever——”

The drooped eyes of the bishop were lifted languidly, perhaps from curiosity ; they fell on the white tie, and

dropped again. This was the conventional ecclesiastical praise, of which he was pretty tired now. Lay encomiums were more refreshing.

"Good-bye, doctor. Come and see me. Where is Major Grainger?" he said, softly.

Half-a-dozen faces looked round eagerly. Half-a-dozen hands pointed and tapped on a shoulder. Polly saw the tall, black-bearded, cold-looking gentleman come forward slowly; his arm was taken affectionately by the bishop, and both vanished.

But the effect of the spectacle on her father was very striking. He gave a start, and then followed hastily, dragging her. There was a crowd.

"Do keep back; where are you going to, Sir?—really you must have patience," were some of the remonstrances addressed to the eager clergyman, who was floundering on, pushing rather rudely, and treading on toes. But they got down quite too late. The bishop was in an open carriage; Mrs. Talboys and their daughter also. Hats were off.

"Better come with us, Grainger?" said the bishop to that officer. "Very well, just as you like. Drive on now."

The major turned and saw the wistful, eager look of both father and daughter following the departing dignitary. He smiled, and said to Polly:

"Well, were you happy on the platform?"

Mr. Churchill answered for her.

"My dear Sir, you have laid us under an obligation. I wished to see his lordship, who has a sort of knowledge

of me, only I was disappointed in a friend. You know him very well ; a relative, perhaps ? ” he added, doubtfully.

“ Yes, ” said the other, bluntly, and still looking down at Polly. “ Well, now the great show is over, what are you going to do ? ”

“ Oh, Sir, ” said Polly, — “ that is, Major Grainger—I mean. ”

“ My name ; quite right. How did you know that ? ”

“ Oh, ” said Mr. Churchill, with warmth, “ not to know one who has so helped us ! What do you take me for ? ”

“ Oh, you heard the bishop mention it, ” said the major, half contemptuously. “ To be sure. ”

“ We are going back to Cumberley by the next train, ” said Polly ; “ and if you will let us thank you again—— ”

“ And if, ” struck in her father, “ you could spare time, Sir, to come over and look in on us any morning, we should be delighted, I am sure. ”

The officer answered stiffly and coldly,

“ I have no time for visits, as you may suppose. Certainly not at that distance. A major has too much to do. Pray excuse me now : good-day. Good-morning, Miss Churchill. ”

There was certainly a difference in the tone of his last good-bye, which, of course, Mr. Churchill did not notice.





CHAPTER XVI.

A DEPARTURE.

THE latter was only half pleased by the result of the day. Polly even was grave. It had drawn on their little bank rather seriously. When they got back to their own little town, the reverend gentleman being in a very moody humour with his treatment, and at the heavy outlay of the fruitless expedition, they found young Harry Burgess waiting eagerly at the station. He had come to meet them. He was not a creditor, who were the only sort of people likely to "come and meet" Mr. Churchill. That gentleman was in a sort of abstracted mood, and walked home with his eyes fixed dreamily on the clouds—where he made out fanciful shovel hats, and strangely distorted aprons—very much as the admirable Doré would depict them.

But Burgess, whom a hard day's work only inspired, walked on cheerfully, full of gaiety, and heard from Polly a full account of their adventures as mentioned.

In the evening he came up again to join their tea.

Mr. Churchill, then in somewhat more attentive humour, because his tea always made him more cheerful, was beginning to find an indistinct sort of attraction towards the new acquaintance, and dwelt on his merits with a persistence that could only have been prompted by some remote ecclesiastical instinct. It actually did so turn out; for towards the end of the night, when the others were talking softly, and he had just finished in his head the rough draught of a letter to Lord Hanaper, he suddenly turned round with a half cry, "Polly! get me Dodd—quick, child; stir yourself."

Polly went calmly, brought the five years' old treasury of heraldic knowledge, and placed it in her father's hands.

Dodd did not clear up the point.

But no one knew the shifts and turnings of that remarkable storehouse so well as the clergyman. He knew well the various heraldic covers he might draw, and if he could not find what he wanted under one head, he could try under another. The alphabetical "ruck" of honourables at the end was always certain to give up something. And very soon he had found the names of Grainger and Talboys close together; the one having married a niece or nephew of the other. But connected they were; and one Grainger was the Right Honourable Theophilus Grainger, who had been governor of Malta.

Nothing could be more satisfactory. It seemed to the clergyman that there was a sort of instinct in these cases which never deceived. It was almost prompted of Heaven, and indeed Dodd himself he almost looked on

as "an inspired" writer. As he said, he would have taken his affidavit in the matter beforehand; and certainly would have done so, had the machinery been at hand.

And in truth the clergyman's eagerness so clouded the nicer instincts of discernment in all matters that concerned the absorbing thought of his life, he would have been ready to kiss *any* book tendered to him, and with perfect innocence subscribe any declaration.

He laid his impressions before the two, and talked himself into exultation before the night was over.

"An exceedingly proper man, that major," he said, "and his behaviour was very marked. He was a gentleman, and did not like to see another gentleman and a clergyman treated so. The Graingers are of a good military stock, with excellent interest, and I have heard the best accounts of Talboys. A fine prelate, a good man, full of the concerns of his diocese—charitable, and has taken care of all his own family, of course: he would do anything for his family and connexions."

Burgess listened wondering and disturbed; already he had not relished the interference of the military deliverer and the detailed account of his services.

"I tell you," went on Mr. Churchill, now building very rapidly, "I'll go over to-morrow, and wait on this gentleman. It's only politeness. The Carabiniers, I know, are there. I'll find out about it. It's only common decency, after his civility. I'll ask him over here, and you can give him a bit of lunch. That is, of course, if he be Talboys' nephew."

Polly answered calmly, "Yes, papa, I think so. He was very civil indeed."

Even already, as he went away, Burgess thought he saw a change in Mr. Churchill's manner. That gentleman had turned cold, or rather indifferent, and gave him his hand with a lofty and almost episcopal bearing. Harry went away very low-spirited, for even with being perfectly secure of her heart, he knew Polly well, and that it was not of the least use, without being secure of her reverend father's as well. He sat a long time up in the little parlour at the "Speed the Plough," but went to bed at last, quite reassured by his faith in Polly's love.

With this state of things life went on cheerily at the Hall, for Squire Godfrey's own presence was sure to command heartiness and good spirits. He was always out tramping along, and often met Polly going on her simple household missions, now very frequently rallying her on the new relation she had entered into. "I can tell you," he said, "I don't think Henley is half pleased with the notion. Go along, you little poacher. You must be interfering with other ladies' property, must you, Miss? When did you hear from him? Tell me all about it."

Yet he had noted the rather saddened look about Polly's face, and the air of responsibility and struggle for cheerfulness; but not being very acute in his judgment, had set all this to the account of "fretting about that cold father of hers." "Well, girls are good faithful things. Poor child, I dare say it has something to do with that father of hers."

It was one morning when Polly was returning home

that she met the Squire riding very fast towards the Hall. He pulled up suddenly.

"Here's a sad trouble for us," he said, "and I know you'll pity us. There's poor Charlie been complaining of a cough which has stuck to him a long time, and the doctor says he must take him to town, and have the best advice. Poor fellow! Why I thought Charlie was as strong as a horse, and so I dare say he will turn out to be; for between you and me, the country doctors shy at everything. Consumption, indeed! However, we are all going up by the evening mail, but will be down again in a few days. Consumption, indeed!" and the Squire cantered away very fast. Polly had indeed noted the pale face of the young man and his constant "dry" cough. But he was so strong; standing for a whole day up to his middle in water, and getting wet, through going without a great coat, and other feats, which, indeed, it might have occurred to her were not so much strictly proofs of strength as likely to be the reasons of such infirmities as the local doctor had discovered. In an hour they had gone away without any fuss or confusion, which indeed the suddenness of his departure prevented.

Polly told her father when she got home. He looked at her restlessly, as with an uneasy speculation as to how this step might affect him, and as if she—"with her habitual want of thought—I must think for everybody and everything"—had passed by some advantage.

"Going to town," he repeated. "Then why didn't you"—he had to pause, for it was not very clear to him what the office was he wished Polly to undertake. His indis-

tinct dreamy notion was that she should have instantly pressed the Squire to bring back a rich preferment for him. "Why didn't you?—but of course not. Everyone of you are helpless, and will be so to the end of the chapter." The whole of that night he brooded over this, as of something lost or thrown away; and really it did seem as though this was a forecasting of what was to take place on the next day.

For betimes, on one morning about a week later, the green gate was heard to flap to with extra power. That sound was always an excellent evidence of character; and this time the gate had been let go with a haughtiness and contempt very significant. Then there was a slow heavy stride and crunching of the gravel. Mr. Churchill looked out and started, for he saw it was Doctor Henley.

"What does this man want?" he thought. "What game can he be having up now?"

The doctor was very complacent and gracious, and took a seat leisurely, making the chair creak under him. "Well now, Mr. Churchill," he said looking round, and blowing a little with the exertion of walking, "what do you think? I have a bit of news to tell you, and good news too. It depends on whether one has friends or enemies."

Mr. Churchill's eyes began to glisten and peer wistfully at the doctor. This, of course, referred to him. "They have not forgotten me, it seems," went on the doctor, "down here, though indeed they might have. The Formantons, my earliest, best, and kindest friends, never relaxing, always thinking, were taking care of me all the

while. They have secured me a really good living in Buck—ing—ham—shire." These words he rolled about in his mouth as if they were pleasant morsels of sweet-bread. "And so you see the little thing I now hold——"

"Will be vacant?" said the clergyman, eagerly, and half rising.

The doctor smiled.

"I thought I should come and tell you one of the first; only neighbourly. We go next week. Christy is most eager; would pack this moment; natural in a girl; some of the very nicest families all within a stone's throw, and a garrison town only a mile away."

Mr. Churchill could scarcely restrain his impatience; and when the doctor had stalked away, called hastily to Polly to come down.

"When are they to be back? the Squire, I mean?"

"They said a week," said Polly.

"And isn't it a week now? What folly you talk," said he, in great excitement. "Get your bonnet, and be of some use, and go up and see have they come."

Polly was not a moment literally "getting her bonnet," and which she put on as she came down, and snatching a cape in which she dressed herself in the same way, and was at the Hall and back at the house again in a few minutes. Yet her father was already impatient, and a curling signal of peevishness was already half-mast high.

"Well?" he asked.

"He is to be back to-night, dearest."

"Who? Not they?"

"No; only the Squire."

That was a weary and a fretful time till the train arrived. Then Mr. Churchill set out. At the Hall he found hurry; and the servant told him the Squire was going away that very night again. He was eating a hasty dinner. Just in time, thought the clergyman; yet not without uneasiness. He sent in his name; and following close on his message, heard an impatient,

"Well, show him in—show him in."

The Squire was gloomy.

"Well, Churchill, what's up, my man? We're off on a long voyage to Malaga."

"To Malaga?" repeated the clergyman, in furious consternation. "Oh, no!"

"Oh, yes, though. Poor Charlie is gone, I fear, if we don't. Doctor Rook says we have no time to lose. Doctors here were quite right; so we go. Dear, dear," and the Squire became ruminative. "Well, what's the best news with you? How's my sweet Miss Polly?"

"Eh!—Doctor Henley is going away, too," said Mr. Churchill, with a lamentable attempt at *apropos*.

"Yes, so I heard," said the Squire, uneasily; and half rising. "Have a glass of wine or something? I've such a deal to do. Packet goes to-morrow evening, P. & O."

"Yes, Squire," said Mr. Churchill, desperately. "I wanted to see you, and it is most fortunate—about Doctor Henley's place."

"But what can I do, my dear fellow?" said the Squire,

still more uneasily, and shuffling away. "I have no clerical influence."

"No influence?" said Mr. Churchill, warmly. "You lord of the soil here, and knowing Doctor Brindley!"

"Just a moment, Churchill," said the Squire, bluntly—(I don't want you yet a moment, Bowles)—"I'll speak candidly to you. You see, you pressed me so hard about bothering Brindley at every vacancy, that really he has begged of me as a favour not to ask him again about you; for he can't do it. And there's the whole murder out for you. Much better be aboveboard, you know."

"A trick—a device!" said the clergyman, excitedly. "You promised me; you did, you know!"

"I did," said the Squire, gravely, "and performed that promise."

"Oh! this is always the way," said the other. "People, when the opportunity comes, hang back. Look at that Henley—how *his* people stick to him."

"Well, they are under an obligation to him; but I have really spoken for you till I am sick of it. I owe something to my dignity, Mr. Churchill, and I cannot be going about to all the bishops, begging and whining to 'em for this and that."

"This is always the way," said the clergyman, bitterly. "Just the way—the way of the world. You are no better than the rest, I see."

"That is not a fair speech to make," said the Squire, warmly, "and I did not expect it from you, after all I have tried to do. But I won't go away offended with you—that I am determined; and I'll tell you why: for the

sake of that dear, sweet girl you have at home. There now, I must go. I have some big troubles of my own to fill my mind ; and I assure you I am not at all angry. Good-bye, Churchill. This little burst won't prevent my trying to help you in some other way, if an opportunity comes."

Mr. Churchill had a miserable walk home that night. He talked to himself all the way. It was a plot—a dodge arranged between that scheming fellow, Henley, who took care to feather his own nest. "As for that trumped-up story of Brindley, I don't believe it ; they've just made it up between them." But what chafed him more was the compliment to "that sweet girl at home." This put him out sadly. "Sweet, indeed ; sitting up there all day, and never doing a hand's turn. It's easy to look helpless." For this compliment, which she did not know of, Polly had to pay dearly in a long night of bitter complaint and grumbling, seasoned with the usual "God help me ! It's easy for you to be sweet and resigned, sitting with your hands before you, and imposing on fools outside."

In ten days the Rev. Doctor Henley quitted his parish, receiving an address from the grieving parishioners. To this he made a suitable reply, which will be found given *textuellement* on consulting the *Irnston Mercury* of the date. "Since I came among you," remarked the reverend doctor, according to the usual formula, "I have met with the heartiest, keyind-est co-operation from all sides and shades and shadows of opinion." And he ended with a feeling "God bless you all !" with a hearty

and sonorous "blow" of his nose in a rich silk handkerchief for a "full stop." Then he went away; "he was going to stay just a feeyew days at Formanton, to pay our congratulations to our kind friends there."

A week later came the Rev. Mr. Twisden, a bachelor, and a cold, reserved man. That was another miserable night at the curate's house. For though reason told him he had but a poor chance, he had clung to hope, and had duly engrossed a long letter to Brindley, beginning: "MY LORD, — The vacancy, the proper filling up of which is now engaging your lordship's thoughts, &c.——" Still he could not bring himself to believe that he was to be disappointed. When the fatal news did arrive of Mr. Twisden's coming, he gave way to bitterness and reproaches, as though it was only at that moment he had been refused and found unhoped-for relief in the idea of Polly having had to do with the failure. Yet he was not unkind or hostile; but dwelt on his cruel fate with a gentle resignation, and on all she had brought on him, he having to work for the whole crew, while she sat there and looked "sweet." So the Hall was deserted and shut up, and Polly was deeply grieved to lose her friends, who were now on the broad ocean crossing to Malaga.





CHAPTER XVII.

MAJOR GRAINGER.

MR. CHURCHILL was in the habit of boasting of that rather unfair hostility to the pleasant verdure of the earth which consists in never "allowing the grass to grow under his feet." With his accustomed change of spirits, he very soon had dismissed Doctor Henley from his thoughts, and announced with cheerfulness that he was going over to Irnston. Polly, always delighted when he was engaged heart and soul in a business or negotiation, co-operated eagerly, and with all the house—which was Bridget—was busy betimes cleansing, reviving, and repairing; even made out the railway fare for him, and sent him on his way almost splendidly equipped. He found out the Carabiniers' barracks, and Major Grainger. That gentleman, in a shell-jacket, received him with a sort of coldness which distressed the clergyman a good deal. "You were so kind," he said, "on that occasion. I

don't know what I should have done ; and I am afraid I did not thank you sufficiently."

"And so, I suppose, you could not rest until you saw me again?" said the officer. "Pray say no more about it. I am sorry I am engaged at this moment with the regiment. The colonel is away ; so you must excuse me if I cannot have the pleasure of staying to entertain you."

The clergyman's face fell ; but he would not go away without carrying out something of the business for which he had come.

"It is on my mind, Major Grainger," he said, deferentially, "that I have heard of you or some of your connexions before. The venerable Bishop Talboys, the best and holiest of all our bishops—I am, I feel, better since I heard him the other day. Such words, Major Grainger! they went to the heart. Everyone agrees that he was the only one worth hearing—the only one——"

"I spoke, also," said the major, calmly, and looking at him with a sort of malicious steadiness, to see how he would get out of *that*.

In much confusion, the clergyman almost wriggled and twisted himself.

"I mean, of course, you also, Major Grainger—a plain soldier-like statement. Oh! indeed, I heard of that ; so much to the point, I am sure. But the bishop. I wish I could tell him what I felt ; the delight, the improvement, the—the—that is, I feel——"

The other waited coldly, then said :

"It must be pleasant for you to think of having seen such a virtuous man. Now, would you put him above the Archbishop of York, who is also a connexion of mine?"

"No! no! I don't mean that," said the clergyman, again in confusion, "though I am sure *he* deserves to be archbishop. But you know his virtues."

"I do not, indeed," said the other, impatiently. "You see the orderly waiting here? so really I must——"

"But—but—but," said the reverend gentleman, in despair, "is he your uncle, Major Grainger?"

"I am sorry to say he keeps his patronage within a very narrow circle," was the answer; "and I believe has literally nothing to give away."

"Then he is your relative, Major Grainger? How curious!—how wonderful! I said so to Polly last night."

"Whatever wonder there is in the business you are welcome to. He is my uncle. How is the young lady?"

"Oh! thank you," said the clergyman in a tumult of gratitude. "I am so sorry to have taken up your valuable time; a thousand apologies," and he began to descend the stairs.

"Your mind must be relieved now, said the major, following him—"now that the doubt about the bishop is off it. Is Miss Churchill well? Was she anxious about the matter, too?"

"No, no; you will have your joke. You are all so practical in the Cavalry, and—in the Carabiniers, too.

You are never likely to come our way?" he asked, doubtfully.

"You are at Cumberley?" said the officer. "It is not so improbable some of these days I may have to go over. Good-morning."

Thus dismissed, the clergyman went his way, not a little elated, certainly. In his second-class carriage he was looking out of the window, and building away very hard.

"I knew it was Talboys," he said. "I am never wrong."

Then he remembered a "Talboys on Election," a large octavo, being the Fullerian Lectures (was it?) for some year. Bowing and smiling as he took the episcopal hand, he would say, "There was a time when I could repeat your lordship's 'Election' by heart, a work which, as a great divine and scholar told me, has settled the question. I wish I could show your lordship my copy—all scored and noted with the marks of a very humble admirer." What would the bishop reply to this compliment, glistening as he waved it off? "My poor book has done some little good, I believe. And where are you quartered now, Mr. Churchill—to use the phrase of my nephew Grainger, who has been writing to me about you? Could you find a day to dine," &c. Thus in his second-class carriage he rapidly filled in all his canvas and arranged all his figures.

Then he set to work composing letters, elegant and flowery, beginning "MY LORD BISHOP—The letter which I have had the honour of receiving from your lordship has

almost overpowered me. I am at a loss how to acknowledge in adequate terms your lordship's goodness." Or, after another mode: "MY LORD BISHOP, I am encouraged by your lordship's known liberality of mind to add my humble application to many others, no doubt, for the vacancy now in your lordship's kind gift." This should properly have preceded the last form of letter.

That second-class compartment became also a very handsome dining-room at the palace, with the curtain drawn, a little round table, a cosy fire, with some of the best episcopal claret just sent for from the cellar; and his lordship having just said: "My dear Churchill, you are the sort I should like to have as an officer. The old archdeacon is failing rapidly. I want some one that knows men and the world also. By-and-by we shall see. Help yourself, my friend." How pleasant were these pictures! But our clergyman was the greatest artist of his time in this way, and painted away from morning until night; and it must be said turned his pillow pretty often into a canvas, and through many weary hours of the night got in these fanciful passages and *tableaux de genre*.

The lover's eye soon noticed a change. He had come as usual that night—having the "run of the house,"—a very modest privilege, indeed, as regards mere exercise.

The Rev. Mr. Churchill looked at him with a sort of unconscious surprise as he saw him seated talking to Polly, and a kind of exclamation broke from him.

"What, come to spend the evening with us?" As though this was quite a new feature in their intercourse;

a feature, however, that was as ordinary as the breakfast or dinner to which the clergyman sat down every day.

The young lover was, besides, in low spirits, and this treatment did not at all encourage him. He had come on the old, easy, assured footing of confidence to tell his concerns, and, perhaps, to receive comfort,—as when he would sit and talk to Polly in a low voice, so as not to interrupt her father, over at his own desk, busy with the form of a diplomatic application to Sir John, or to the Lord Bishop of Leighton Buzzard—who was as one parent to them both, as he was to the three or four “squalid creatures” now happily at peace up stairs in their little cots, where Polly’s own hands had bestowed them. Now he walked up and down restlessly, with his hands in his pockets, with his eye resting with a sort of cold intolerance upon the young man, who at last rose and took his leave, not, however, before he had been prompted by Polly’s gentle hint.





CHAPTER XVIII.

SPECULATION.

HER father, in very rusty black, with his hands buried in his old-fashioned, deep "breeches pockets," said with hostility—

"Very free and easy, all this! The man has no tact or manners, and comes and goes as if it was his own parlour!"

Polly sighed, and came with the clerical slippers, which she laid submissively at his feet.

"Uncommon nice fellow, that!" went on her father in a sort of pleased rumination. "A true gentleman! Admirably connected too,—no better; Talboys may be very well content."

"Why, was it the bishop?" asked Polly, with hesitation.

"God bless me! of course," said her father, testily. "Didn't I tell you so last night? But it's always the way,—I have to give you chapter and verse to prove anything to you, as if it was the chaplain examining me. You think you know as well as I do. I tell you what,

don't blunder in this. I can see where I have made a good impression ; and, I can tell you, it's about as good a thing as I have got into as yet. He'll be coming over here by-and-by. I'd better write at once."

And the reverend gentleman went to his desk and began—

"MY DEAR MAJOR GRAINGER,—It gave me sincere delight to have the pleasure of meeting you as I did yesterday. We have a little humble retreat of our own here, and if you could spare a few hours from the round of military duties," &c.

He was so engrossed with this composition, and wrote so many copies, that Polly soon rose up softly to put by her work—diminutive linen clothing for the family, for she was sempstress and milliner also.

Suddenly her father, walking about abstractedly, struck his forehead, and called out—

"I knew I had it somewhere ! It wasn't with the other books. Go up to the lumber closet, and look out the book on 'Election and Grace.' I am sure it's Talboys'. One of the covers is off. Now do look sharp. That's the way all our time is wasted in this house."

Polly flew at once—covered herself with the book dust, all greasy as it was, and rummaged this and that closet "till she was sick."

After an impatient call or two he was up himself beside her.

"Always the way ; must do everything myself !" &c. —with the other common formulas. "Must do everything myself !"

Nothing approaches the effrontery of unconscious selfishness. He worked himself into a fume as he looked for it. Of course he was wrong in its description. It had both covers on. He brought it down in triumph. He was right!

"I told you so!" as though some one had been disputing with him. "What a coincidence! What a providence, I may say! I am never wrong in trusting to my own instinct." He threw it down on the table, and became silent. He was writing to the bishop,—
'MY LORD,—I little dreamed, the other day, when I had the privilege of listening to your eloquence for the first time, that you were also one to whom I was indebted in my college days,' &c.

As he was thus engaged Polly took up the book and read the title to herself: "Election and Grace . . . a Series of Six Discourses: being the Fullerian Lectures for the year, &c., by the late Charles Talboys, D.D." Polly saw this at once, and was going to cry out, but the sense of the disappointment for him embarrassed her. She saw by his illuminated face that he was addressing the bishop, rolling out "My Lord:"—he loved that word; and the next pleasant thing in the world to being addressed by the title, was uttering it. With a sigh she closed the book, and thought she would break it to him gently in the morning at breakfast; for it was always her principle to strive and tide everything disagreeable over for the night; and so she did, and went softly to bed, leaving him, now receiving a very gracious reply from his lordship. At breakfast next morning she read out the

title, leaning on the words "the late." His way of taking the disappointment was characteristic. He laid it all on her ; and she was really relieved he took it in that way. "And you never found that out? Heaven help us! I'm an unfortunate man—no help—no co-operation—nice mess you'd have brought me into! But what is it to you?—you actually reading it out there, and only I happen to notice it. Are you to be helpless in this way all your life?" &c. Thus he had this comfort in his disappointment, and Polly was delighted to see he finished by working himself into the idea of his own vast superiority, and keenness, and knowledge of the world, which had saved him from such a mistake : so at the end he was in rather a good humour.





CHAPTER XIX.

A VISIT.

HER father had gone out the next morning "on business," with a whole mail of letters addressed to the "Right Hon. Sir Thomas Groper, Bart., Groper House, Sussex," "The Lord Bishop of Birkenhead, the Palace," and many more, for "posting" was with him always a solemnity akin to "going down to the House," and by a sort of fiction had grown into the shape of real business; when a tall gentleman, with a high forehead, called at the door and asked to see Miss Churchill. This distinguished stranger overwhelmed the maid Bridget, in her very modest working dress, and made her falter in her replies, as she showed him into the sort of brig's cabin which was their study, drawing-room, library, and what not. Polly, never taken by surprise, always neat and presentable, even in her working clothes, came down, and knew by a sort of instinct who her visitor was. She was not in the least disturbed.

"My father is from home," she said, "but will be back soon. We were so much obliged to you for your assistance the other morning."

"He is under no obligation," said the major, coolly; "men can always take care of themselves: at least I never help them out of their difficulties. But I heard a lady beside me complaining, so I came forward at once."

"Thank you then, very much," said Polly, warmly; "won't you sit down?"

"We are very dull at our manufacturing town," said he, sitting down; "your father asked me to come over here, describing it in very gorgeous terms. I am afraid he has a warm imagination. It seems, excuse me saying so, rather a hungry sort of place. Though, indeed, where I am is much the same. Of course, it is relieved by such exciting amusement as we had the other day."

"It was so good of you," said Polly, again. "My dear father had set his heart on getting to that platform. He would have been miserable if he had had to go away."

"Not much to be miserable about!" he answered, reflectively; "then I came splendidly forward and saved you, of course, from seeing your father's misery? What do you say?"

She understood and did not quite like this tone; so she looked at him steadily, and said, "From whatever motive, we were most obliged to you all the same."

"Then I'll tell you frankly what the motive was," he said, more softly and gently; "I heard a girl's voice beside me, so like some one that once belonged to us,

and that"—he paused a moment, "that does not belong to us now,—only a sister, in fact. There's the whole explanation of the mighty business. I suppose you think me very soft and foolish, to put myself out for such a reason?"

"Indeed, I do not," said Polly, warmly, "far from it. I admire you for it. Such a motive does great credit to anyone. And I can quite understand; for if poor little Tommy up stairs"—and she paused. "And was I like your—forgive me, I don't mean that—I speak very carelessly——"

"Not at all," he said, now cold again, "it is quite a matter of fact. There was a sort of look——. And, now, why would your father have been wretched if he had not got on the platform?"

Polly was embarrassed. "Oh, there were people there he wished to meet."

"I recollect," he said, smiling, "a holy man, a bishop, was in the case. But the notion amuses me. Miserable because a man cannot get on a platform! What a text to preach his next sermon on! I should not be miserable, thank Heaven, if the platform was made of gold. Every thing is pretty much alike to me."

"But why so?" said Polly, innocently—she had her "work" in her hand, some junior clothing, and this was all new to her,—“that must make life very weary."

"It *is* weary to me," he said, impatiently. "Now, could you guess this, that I am about the most hated man in the army? I am told so. Some of these days you may hear of my being shot by one of the men!"

Polly started, and looking at the hard, cold face and the high forehead, somehow had an instinct that this might be true.

"Just ask them," he went on, "the people of that place—they know my reputation—or perhaps have given it to me. 'A grinding tyrant.' 'They can give me a character.' 'Hated by his men,' and all that."

Here entered the clergyman, in a great bustle and exuberance.

"Major Grainger! God bless me! And how long have you been here? Oh, this is very bad, Polly; why didn't you at once—" and he looked at her reproachfully, without adding what the failure of duty was. "You are come to look in on us," he went on, smiling, "Major Grainger? You must be tired after your journey. Polly, why didn't you—I hope you have—I am sure Major Grainger would——"

The major answered him coldly, "Miss Polly seems to have done all sorts of things in a very short space of time. If you mean refreshment, I had rather not. I never take anything."

"Very well, very well; we won't press you. And how are they getting on over there? And your relation, the good bishop—a perfect model of a Christian pastor—Major Grainger, I have been raving of him ever since. A truly apostolic man. He has won golden opinions from all sides; administers his diocese, like—like——"

"Pretty much like any of his brethren. They are all apostolic men. And I know he has this one special feature in his administration, in which he copies the early

apostles,—he keeps all his promotion and livings, either strictly for the hard-worked clergy under him, never admitting any outsiders; or for his own family and connexions. You must admire him for that, Mr. Churchill!”

That gentleman smiled a little ruefully, and became downcast. Polly pitied her father from her gentle soul. She looked up from her sewing, and with some colour in her cheeks, said, a little excitedly, “You don’t mean that, Major Grainger, and I know why you say it.”

He turned to her quickly with surprise: “Out of a charitable motive, to save our friend here from wasting precious hours in the vainest and most fruitless pursuit. Is not that it?”

“As you ask me,” said Polly, her voice trembling a little, “no, I do not give you credit for that. There is no harm in wishing to rise. In the course of life you have chosen, you wished to become major before this, and wish now to be a colonel. Now, I could tell you the reason, and it is not so charitable a one.”

“Polly!” said the clergyman, in horrified reproach.

“But you should add,” said the major, and rising to go deliberately, “that I helped you before this gentleman came in, by foolishly giving you that little sketch of myself. Served me right—good-bye.”

“You’re not going,” said the clergyman almost distractedly, “leaving us in this way? As for her,” he went on, following him out, “she’s a child; she talks that way to every one. She shall explain it to you, and

retract. My dear Sir, we meant nothing. I beg your pardon, and she shall beg your pardon."

"I am dreadfully offended," he answered seriously, "and I tell you I am not a man to pass it over. The remembrance of the way I have been insulted here to-day shall go with me to my very grave. To think of a young girl not out of her teens attempting to treat a man of my position, a major, in that way! However, I blame you more, for you are her father, and are more or less accountable. Good-bye, Mr. Churchill, Sir."

The clergyman was left staring blankly after him, for these words were spoken with the utmost gravity, and the speaker appeared to be quite in earnest. But when he recovered himself, and came into the ship's cabin, what a cruel volley of railing was spent upon our Polly's head—for the reverend gentleman put no restraint upon himself in dealing with his children when people were not by. She had spoiled all—ruined all. She had marred all his chances—blighted all his hopes. It might have been reasonably almost supposed that his appointment had been made out, and that, by Polly's behaviour, the angry soldier had revoked his gracious gift. Nay, he went back a long way, and discovered that many fair schemes and prospects in his past life had been blighted by her "stupidity" and interference. "No, no," said the furious and reverend gentleman, stopping before her, "it will be always the same to the end of the chapter. You're always helpless. I must do every stitch for you. There's that all done for now. The man will never put his nose inside the door, never! And I was as secure of the

bishop as ever man was. It's cruel, so it is—monstrous cruel !”

Polly, when the gale was abating a little, came in quietly with “he'll come again, papa, in a day or two.” Works spoken so calmly and confidently that he stopped, and with one of his quick transitions fixed his eyes on her, and said cheerily, “Do you know, we might get him to fix a day, and ask him over to dinner—eh? Do ye think he'd come?” and in a few minutes more was busy building away, and painting in spectral dinners with even the indistinct outline of the bishop himself hovering about the board.





CHAPTER XX.

A MARTINET.

THE Carabiniers, as we have seen, were quartered in Irnston. They lived in a series of huge brick-walled, iron-bound squares, with an archway, where a long-legged soldier, carrying a short carbine on his arm like a baby, came in and out like "the gentleman" in the toy weather houses. Inside, horses seemed always being groomed. The men lounged about with the peculiar straddling gait of soldiers; and wore their caps so absurdly on one side of their heads, as to make them seem like the lids of pill-boxes that would *not* shut down.

Many of their caps, however, were pushed straight with savage vehemence, as the men spoke of one subject. The colonel, "a fair, straightforward honourable man," had been away for many weeks now on sick leave; nor was it known when he would recover, or return again. The regiment was longing for it; for the colonel, an ordinary, impassive being of the rough colonel type,

found himself invested with virtues he little dreamed of. This was all owing to the unpopularity of the major.

This gentleman has been described. In his character was a basis of extraordinary sensitiveness, on which some misfortune of early life working had made him see undue offence, insult or injury, in each motion of everyone he came in contact with. People who knew him a little, and were inclined to be indulgent to him, imagined that he felt that all the world was cruel and harsh in its opinions and treatment of him; and that he thought it best to meet them on the same grounds. The result was, that he was scarcely on speaking terms with such of his officers as were not afraid of him. There were a few who had indulgence for him and bore with his failings. With the "men," however, there was no mistaking the feeling; as he ruled them, not merely with a rod of iron, but with a red-hot one. Often did a prophesying sergeant say to a group, "Mind what I says, Bill. Some day, some feller will go straight to the barrack-room and fetch down his carbine from the rack, and cover *him* from the window in the square there! Mind, I say it. He'll be hung for it; but won't mind that."

And one in the group would mutter, "And by — it would serve him right!"

In his rooms—living in society and with over five hundred human figures about him; looking daily at many hundred faces; hearing the chatter of countless voices—the major was a lonely man. At dinner, indeed, he presided, and made an effort to talk as other men, but he failed; and was always angry with himself for failing.

Then he became more bitter and morose. The officers disliked him and were afraid of him; for he had a strange power, and could control them. And he had the art of steeping his sentences in a sort of bitter extract—an *amarum quid*, which he made them chew, as it were, and yet without being rude or offensive. They shrank—especially the junior and newly appointed ensigns—from his cold, dull eye, as from a schoolmaster's. There was no bullying—no injustice—no intimidation, so there was no legitimate cause of complaint. Yet he was disliked, and cordially disliked, and had not a friend in the regiment. No one even knew his story, or a hint of it; but set all his behaviour down to a naturally cruel, “ill-conditioned,” graceless, “Bill Sykes” sort of nature. Yet if they had looked at the picture over his chimney-piece, that of a soft, tender, interesting girl, they might have judged him less harshly. A woman would have at once caught the hint and gradually worked the whole out. But no women found their way to that room, and no men save the stray officers whom business brought there. The only thing that staggered them was a foot colonel, who came to dine at the mess during his absence on a two days' leave, and who said he had been at school and at college with Grainger; and dwelt long on his generosity, kindness, and other virtues. Seeing their disbelief, he went into instances of money lent, charity given, love bestowed; and wound up with “a true open Christian—gentle and trusting as a girl—and no finer fellow breathing.”

There was almost a laugh at this extraordinary character.

And it was universally agreed, after the colonel's departure, that "old Dodd"—that was the colonel's name—had been "sticking the claret too freely." No other solution of his long and deep reflection occurred to the military gentlemen; and it was agreed that the whole was uncommon good—"good as a play," and that old Dodd had "stuck" the claret uncommon hard.

Presently the major was in his room, with an orderly in attendance. He was looking over papers. "Wait outside!" he said, sharply. The orderly did wait outside; and whispered to his fellow the old and favourite prophecy, that if ever a man was born to have a musket-ball from the ranks through him, he was one. Then they were sharply called in.

"So that Davis has been at it again! I thought I had given him a good lesson. I see I must make an example of the fellow this time. I shall have discipline in this regiment at all events, and at any cost. Bring him here."

In a few moments they returned with a fine fair looking young trooper. The major's cold eyes ranged over him.

"You are incorrigible," he said. "I intend to give you a severe lesson this time, for your own good and that of the regiment. I mean to keep up discipline here at all risks and all costs. You may get people to write to the newspapers; it's nothing to me. I have one thing to look to——"

"Please, Sir, may I say a word?" the young trooper said frankly.

"Of course," said the major. "If you have anything to say, say it; I am for justice, as of course."

"Please, Sir, then it was not my fault; at least I mistook the road, and so——"

"Drunk!—the usual thing. That excuse makes it worse."

"I never was drunk in my life! I'd like to see the man that would charge——"

"Take care, Sir!" said the officer, in a passion. "Keep a guard over your tongue, or you don't know what I may be tempted to do. No sauciness to me from any one of you! None of your rebellious looks! I warn you, and I warn your fellows, if they try and get into a contest with me, we shall see who will have the worst of it. I know pretty well what goes on in the ranks, and is said about me there. You have plenty of spies and informers among you. But, as sure as I stand here, I'll not stop till I've made every one of you know your place!"

There was a silence for a few moments after this burst. The officer wrote a little, and then said sharply:

"Take him away out of that! We'll see what a court-martial will say to this!"

"Oh! Sir, you would not disgrace me!" said the young trooper, passionately. "Deal with me now! Do, Sir! Give me any punishment——"

"Take him away!" thundered the major.

The young man was led away across the square to the cells. That evening the scene was told and retold very often, amid dark looks and mutterings. And one trooper remarked: "Never mind! When we are fighting the blacks in a month or so, if a carbine don't go off by

accident from a hind rank and make a hole through *him* my name's not Dick Pritchard."

None of his officers associated much with him. At them he was always coldly sneering, against which they chafed; but when they were inclined to resent it, he could be "down" on them in a hundred bitter ways. They had besides the warning of Murray, the hot-tempered but foolish captain, who after long-suffering had determined to bring the matter to an issue between him and the major. Then the regiment saw the latter in a new character they had never dreamed of before. He rose as it were in his wicked might; he showed an overpowering vigour and vindictiveness, which bore down all before it. This, too, was regulated by a judgment and propriety in which the captain was sadly wanting. The result was the last-named unhappy officer "went to the wall," as it was said, and was routed from the regiment.

He was sitting in his room writing, with orderlies waiting at the door. He was looking over the charges, &c., and suddenly called out—

"That Martin has been out again without leave. Bring him round. We must give that fellow a lesson *this* time."

Martin was brought in under guard. He had been out—indeed, down at Cumberley—past the lawful time the night before. He was a good-looking young private. The major's cold eyes rested on him.

"So you've been at the old work again!" he said. "We must take you in hand at once. I see only serious treatment will do with you. So you are determined to

defy me ! Well, with all my heart ; we'll see who'll win at that game !”

“Please, Sir,” said the young soldier, “it wasn’t so much my fault. I forgot the hour, and made all the haste I could, after ; and if you’d only show me a little indulgence, and give me another chance——”

“I will not !” said the major, fiercely. “I’ll give you no chance ! You know the rules, and you break them ! You fly in my face ! I’ll give you no chance ! No one ever thought of giving me a chance—and quite right of them, too ! Take him away ! We’ll see what a court-martial will say to you, my fine fellow ! If they choose to say of me in the ranks that I am a hard officer and a cruel one, they shall have good reason ! I’ll teach ’em that I am so ! There—take him off ; I’ll hear no more of it !”

And he was taken away. The speech about the stray rifle-ball was repeated pretty often that night.





CHAPTER XXI.

THE MAJOR'S VISIT.

MR. CHURCHILL was holding many spectral dinner parties in his little room, and entertained the major a prodigious number of times. "I like you," he heard him say; "and I know the bishop likes you, and will like you every day more and more. Why not think of something in the military way?—we could work *that* for you. There's Macpherson, the chaplain, getting old, and this district is a deuced good thing."

On the next morning Mr. Churchill actually wrote over, as he had proposed, beginning with a masterly flourish,—“MY DEAR SIR,—If your military duties do not too seriously trench on your valuable time, kindly do me a favour. You will find us a little in the rough. We can at least guarantee a hot mutton chop, which I believe epicures hold to be an excellent thing. We have often talked since you left over your little sketch

of the good bishop, who, I see, is to preach in London on the 20th for the South African Orphans."

This had been despatched under a faint protest from Polly.

"How can we do it, dearest? We have nothing fit or decent to put him down to——" which her father, always enthusiastic in his plans, hastily overruled, and in a torrent of words bore down all difficulties. He then went "on business; down town as it were, *i.e.* to post his letter, and study addresses, parishes, &c. in the "Clerical Guide," of which there was a copy down at the village reading-room. No one ever looked into that but himself, by whom indeed it had been ordered at the charges of the society. Polly had to rush away to quell an *émeute* which had broken out suddenly above stairs, and found that the rioters had thrown up barricades.

Bridget, her faithful serjeant, and a strong hard-working muscular creature, faithful and versatile in all shapes of labour, came rushing up and drove back the crowd without anger or reproach. It was as much in her daily course of life as making the beds or "washing up the things." One young gentleman incorrigible, well known to the police, a frequent ringleader, had to be dealt with a little severely on moral grounds, and for the discipline of the house. He was accordingly led away howling to a private place—even the gentle Polly reluctantly approving of this severity, and there punished according to the form and in the place provided by the old immemorial statute.

Polly was busy below with her daily repairs, and to her comes in Bridget, bony, and a little flushed after the

exertion, but with a troubled air. There was great confidence between mistress and maid, who was indeed more a friend, and had been a promoted nurse. She came to her with a "Oh, Miss, there's such a business about Charley!"

Charley was the Carabinier soldier-cousin to Bridget. As she entered with all sympathy into Polly's little troubles, and was called into council, so Polly now lifted her head, and with sympathising eyes commiserated Charley's fate.

His little "outing" had been discovered; he had been brought up before authority; and the poor lad, being flesh and blood, had forgotten himself, and answered without respect to the despot who ruled the regiment.

"Oh, Miss, he'll be broke!" went on the maid, in despair at the disgrace and punishment impending over this favourite warrior. His fate was indeed a matter of concern to a few of the village maidens; and in that dull settlement the event had made some stir.

"See, Miss," she went on, "here is his letter, poor soul."

Polly was troubled, and entered into the case with all her heart.

"It is very sad, Bridget," she said; "and I recollect his figure now."

"The finest got-up man in the troop," said Bridget, enthusiastically. "Oh, Miss, you can speak to the major; he will do it for you."

"The major," said Polly, opening her eyes in unfeigned astonishment; "why, is he in *his* regiment?"

"To be sure," said Bridget; "that's the reason. I know he would do it for you, though he is a bully, and a cruel one."

"But it would be very odd my asking—and—he would refuse, Bridget; he would."

"Well, it is mortifying to be refused," Bridget said, not unadroitly.

"Indeed it is not that," said Polly; "and if he *does* come again, I would show you, by speaking to him about it; but it would be no use."

"No, Miss, speaking wouldn't; a line—a bit of writing. Oh, think of the poor, handsome fellow disgraced, and maybe fifty lashes; for the major, they do say, is all for the cat——"

This appeal had effect, and the same post that took away the reverend invitation, took away also a little letter from Polly. The major received both the following morning. That evening, when the clergyman had gone down town on business—that is, to consult the London Directory, &c., and Polly was as usual, "on her beat," and the lock-up was pretty full, as usual, Bridget came, in a fever of excitement, with news that the major was below.

"And oh, *now*, Miss, won't you speak *hard*?"

Polly was greatly agitated and visibly fluttered—not for the reasons that Bridget suspected, but from wonder and surprise at this prompt visit. He came in rather stern.

"So you have taken up a new *rôle*, Miss Churchill," he said, "interfering with the course of military justice? I assure you I do not recollect such a thing——"

"Oh," said Polly, naturally, "I did not know that; I did not, indeed; and I am very sorry."

"I have, besides, always made a stern, inflexible rule never to listen to *any* intercessors. It does no good; they have never had the slightest effect on me. Is not this, too, what you have heard of me?"

He waited with some curiosity for her answer.

Polly lifted her large eyes, and answered him truthfully,

"Yes, they said something like it."

"Yes," said he, a little vindictively, "and a great deal more, which you are too polite to repeat. I don't care what they say. It almost tempts one to give them something startling to talk of. Why can I not punish the blackguards of my regiment without being blackened in this way, over here at an obscure village?"

He spoke all this very fiercely and angrily. Polly looked up, and answered him gently, yet firmly.

"Well, perhaps I should not have done it. I don't see so *much* harm in it, after all; but it was only a letter—a girl's letter—and you have refused; that's all."

"No, that's *not* all; and I have not refused."

Polly looked again, full of wonder.

"How you stare at me!—the great savage bear. Shall I tell you what I did? I got your 'girl's letter' this morning. Well, it was a very bad case. The fellow is a thorough scoundrel—a regular gallows bird—though he imposes on the women about here. *They*, of course, think every soldier's blackguardism splendid and effective; though with ladies, it seems, officers are not so

indulgently thought of. However, I have done what I could for him, and let him off with a sound reprimand."

Smiles came into Polly's face—smiles of deep gratitude.

"How good you are to me! How shall I thank you? And I confess *now* I did do you injustice; but I shall never judge by appearances again."

"That is to be the reward, it seems," he said, sarcastically. "*That* quite overpowers me."

"May I," said Polly, with a trustful beseeching look customary with her, "may I run and tell Bridget?"

"Certainly. Who is the lady?"

"Bridget, our maid, his relation; she is so deeply interested. Here, Bridget, come in here."

"Oh, don't—don't," the major said, sourly. "Please, no fuss; I must request and beg——"

Disappointed, Polly looked at him. Bridget came in hastily.

"Oh, nothing—that is——"

"Oh, let us make no secret of it now," he said. "It was merely that that relation of yours, who is in my regiment, has been got off. He had better take care again, though, I'd advise you, if you want to see much of him."

The tone of this speech was very rude and hostile; and Bridget, answering him, said eagerly—

"Then he was unjustly and most cruelly treated. He had done nothing. God help the poor soldiers!"

"Bridget," said Polly, in horror, "why don't you thank Major Grainger?"

"I want no thanks," he said, hastily ; "we are accustomed to this sort of return. Pray let the business rest ; we have something else to speak of." (From that hour his eye rested with a cold hostility on the maid of that house.)

"Your father asked me to dine to-day. Curiously enough there are some hills about here which I want to explore. I am a great walker—a solitary walker ; so it falls out very conveniently. So if you can give me something after my walk—— You see what is in store for you."

With this the major rose up, took his hat, and went away.





CHAPTER XXII.

THE DINNER.

THERE was now a serious duty cast upon our Polly—the preparation of the little dinner. It was not so much in the catering; for their credit, though a little sickly, was still on a tolerably sound basis, the clergyman of the place always having a certain influence. Besides, there was a dreamy indistinct impression abroad of the reverend gentleman having high influences, and that something splendid was always on the point of being done for him. Indeed, Polly's goodwill and unselfish eagerness for her family would have trampled over greater difficulties, had there been such, and secured credit by her persevering little way and winning manner. Bridget, nurse, cook, majordomo, and butler too, had been brought over, though by no means favouring the new guest.

“A dry, freezing, cold-blooded, poor-hearted creature,” she described him. “Wait until they should hear Charley's version of the story!”

Presently comes in the clergyman "from down town," greatly excited by the news which had somehow transpired to him. He was scarcely pleased with all she had done, and found fault with certain arrangements. This excitement presently got the better of his feelings.

"Now try and make everything agreeable to him," he said; "this is the first step on the ladder." (Of course on his ladder, which was the only ladder in the world he dreamed of.) "A man like that can do what he likes with the bishop. Lucky, my dear, you have a father who knows the world a little! Now get out your best, and make the finest show you can; and for God's sake try and keep those brats quiet, or they will destroy all!" A request easily made: yet how, with Polly "making a fine show" in the parlour, and Bridget inflaming her face over the kitchen fire,—how was it, in reason, to be done? Yet Polly answered, with the confidence of filial devotion—

"Yes, papa; don't be afraid."

"Yes, you say that, you know," replied her father; "but take care that you do it."

"Later on he was sitting in the parlour dressed and waiting, when the major returned from his walk. The cordiality with which the clergyman welcomed him (he was in his "best frock," brushed carefully by Polly, and a tie quite clean, but tied clumsily), was a sort of rude heartiness and obsequiousness mixed—a manner kept for a possible patron.

"So friendly, my dear major! What I like in soldiers is plain yes and no. 'Come to me such a day,' and you

say 'I will,' or 'I won't'—one thing or the other. Polly, touch the bell, dear: we are quite ready for dinner."

It was a very appetising little meal—a little soup, a small haddock, a roast fowl and sausages, a bottle of champagne and another of claret.

"I am ashamed to put you down to this prison diet. But what can you do? As for getting a decent thing in this hole, as I may call it——"

The major was looking at him with cold contempt. "I never contradict a host; I suppose it would not be polite. Miss Churchill, how do you get on in this 'hole,' as we must call it?"

"Oh, I like it," said Polly, naturally. "Papa does not; he has seen so much of the world."

"That would be a reason *for* liking it. The cure of souls here can't be very laborious."

"Ah! that's it, Major Grainger," said his reverence, plaintively. "There is no field for labour; nothing expansive. The mind all expends itself here; it runs to waste. You will understand the feeling, major; kept at home here, when you see others sent abroad to earn glory and promotion also. It makes a man chafe."

"I do *not* understand the feeling. As you put it to me so directly, I don't know of any glory to be got in the way you mention, and promotion comes nearly as fast at home. I don't relish being sent to India next month to fight wretched blacks."

"*What!* India! Next month! Oh! no!" said Mr. Churchill, with a genuine start of horror.

The other laughed. "How the news affects you!

Really such sympathy is most welcome ; my own sister took it much easier. How do *you* feel, Miss Polly ? ”

“ Oh, I am very sorry,” said Polly, “ especially as there is war going on. But I hope you will return safe.”

“ But—it can’t be true ; there’s no mistake, is there ? It’s so unfortunate.”

“ Mistake ? ” repeated the major—“ how strange ! Why should there be ? I suppose I ought to know something certain about it. Do you know it is very odd, Mr. Churchill, the way this news seems to affect you. Cheer up, Sir ; time will heal your sorrow. See how Miss Polly bears the shock.”

A little confused, the reverend host tried to laugh ; but a gloom set in for the rest of the dinner—attended, too, with a certain pettishness ; for he was not nearly so well-trained a worldling as he boasted himself. Often such vaunting professions have lost the embarked capital of years, by a careless moment’s prodigality. The major rose in spirits as he said this ; spoke to Polly nearly altogether without interruption from the host ; and became softer and more genial in his manner as he did so.

When she was gone, he drew his chair over to the fire, and fixing his cold eye on the clergyman, said quietly, “ You know, the bishop is not obliged to go away.”

The clergyman looked up a little confused. “ The bishop ? ” he repeated.

“ Yes ; my relation the holy man, Talboys. Listen to me a moment, and let us talk a little business. You say you are a man of the world. I haven’t confidence enough to say so much of myself, though I should like

to. The fact is, we are ordered to India ; the dreadful news I have just broken to you. Now I am going to speak with an engaging plainness—to come at once to the point—at once. I had a reason in dining with you to-day ; for I loathe dining early ; I dislike fowl and fish, and sausages make me ill. I say this in the way of business—not to hurt your feelings ; but to show you that I must have had an object. The fact is, I like Miss Polly. She is charming. And if I thought she liked me, or could be brought to like me——”

Mr. Churchill gave a genuine start.

“Pray listen. I have been thinking seriously that it would be really for the advantage of our Church that you should be advanced, and have an opportunity of satisfying your eagerness for a larger area of souls. I don’t see why this couldn’t be done.”

“My dear Sir,” said the clergyman, seizing both his hands, “you are too good !”

“Too religious, you mean,” said the major. “Why should not I contribute my little mite to the good work ? We soldiers can be pious, after all, in our own way.”

Mr. Churchill, whether actually believing in, or merely accepting this apostolic devotion, again broke out into warmth.

“You do my family great honour, Major Grainger ; and I shall take care, Sir, you shall find us sensible of it. I accept your cordial and most flattering proposal in the spirit in which it is made. I can assure you——”

The major interrupted him impatiently.

"Oh! of course; I know that. But about your daughter—what do you say? I suppose she is a sensible girl—at least I take her for one."

The clergyman answered with a sort of enthusiastic scorn :

"My dear Sir! such an idea!—she refuse!"

"I didn't say that," said the officer, coldly. "She must be consulted in the matter; and you, as her father, ought to know her feelings. That there is no one else in the way—you can give that information?"

"Not at all," said the other, with the same exuberance—"nothing of the kind! Such an idea! Polly indeed!"

The officer rose impatiently.

"It is impossible, I see, to get you to understand. Never mind, then. Now, supposing that all arranged, then comes the question of means."

The clergyman's face sank. "Oh! as for that, Major Grainger, I am very sorry. You know, girls nowadays never—at least scarcely ever—but I assure you, later, when they do something for me—we shall try and make out——"

"I am speaking of *my* fortune," said the other, seeming to enjoy the series of misapprehensions into which the other was falling. "It is as well at this stage of the matter to anticipate all reasonable difficulties. It is only fair to mention that I am what is called well off."

"My dear major——"

"Pray allow me to finish. Then for you yourself. As

you wish for a larger sphere of missionary duty, I will speak to the bishop. Mind, I don't say he will do anything for me."

"Oh! he will, I am sure! Such a good man——"

"Perhaps so. I did ask once before, and he certainly wrote me a civil note, and—I think, as we don't join the ladies, they might join us now?"

"To be sure, to be sure," said the clergyman uneasily, "by all means. You were speaking of the bishop. He wrote to you, you said, the kindest note. Just like what I should fancy of him."

"Exactly. Dear me, how late! Tell Miss Polly——"

"But about this letter," said the clergyman fretfully. "Did he refuse?"

The major smiled. "You don't want to see my letter, do you? Well, he did *not* refuse."

Polly came down. She had done wonders above. The junior rioters were all happily got to bed, and without disturbance. Bridget, now relieved of her duties below, was in charge of the others. They were snug for the night; as a sailor would get his ship and ropes snug for the night, and have them off his mind. She came down, in her placid good humour, wishing to have a "chat" with the major, who was a man of the world — and perhaps with a little crafty purpose of strengthening the good opinion she knew she had made. She owed him a little gratitude also for his compliance with her wishes.

"Your papa and I," he said, "have been settling all sorts of important matters in your absence. One about

the bishop, Talboys—with whom we are to make him very intimate—a most apostolic man.”

“Oh ! I am so glad !” said Polly naturally. “Papa is so anxious to know him.”

The major smiled at her *naïveté*.

“I’ll get him to dine on Monday or Tuesday. Would that be a good way to improve the intimacy ? I find his company very heavy, and have not the least taste for episcopal society. Of course *they* would have a good deal to say to each other.”

“Oh ! how kind of you !” said Polly. “You must go, papa, it will just suit.”

“Then that’s settled,” said the officer. “I must go now. Miss Polly, your father is coming on—is sure to rise ; and has taken the first step on the ladder,—has he not ? We must all join and hoist him up. Won’t we ?”

Polly laughed. “Yes, Major Grainger. We won’t find him heavy either, unless it is we that keep him down.”

“Exactly,” said the major, with meaning ; “so a great deal depends on you. You must give him your hand—you will understand all that by-and-by. It is much to have something depending on anyone else. I never had. From *that* high, I had to depend all on myself ; and I have been in the army twenty-four years, from sixteen to near forty. I started with a pittance ; and I owe nothing—promotion—money—favour—to any man !—but everything to myself. What do you say to that, Mr. Churchill ; not your doctrine ?”

Polly looked up ; she had been listening with interest. "That is a little mistake ; papa owes everything to his own exertions ; indeed he does."

The major smiled grimly. "Everything?" he repeated looking round.

"What nonsense you talk, child!" said the clergyman, colouring. "I have plenty of friends, who have been most kind, and pushed me forward in every way."

"So I can see," said the major. "But I suppose Miss Polly meant her 'nonsensical' speech for the best. She, I suppose, does not know the world. Well, I started with the determination not to let any one push me forward——"

"My God!" said the clergyman.

"At least, Miss Polly, I began as a youth, very shy, with good-will towards every man, thinking the world was beautiful, and all that. The first instance of its beauty was being robbed by a guardian, then by a friend to whom I had lent hundreds or given hundreds. When, hunted and harassed by duns and difficulties, I came to him, he put me off, and finally refused. That cured me. There were one or two other matters. So, for over twenty years I have been a soldier, and nothing but a soldier, all pipeclay and discipline. I was determined, as I was treated so I would treat others—to be cold, hard, cruel even. And I have found it answer very well. I got all my money back ; my promotion I got myself, and it never cost me a shilling ; they had to promote me, for I was the best man."

"I am sure, yes," said Mr. Churchill, eagerly, for a

long time left out of the conversation ; "the best, certainly, that I know."

"How, pray?" said the other, turning on him. "What can you know? Oh! I see—a compliment. Well, Miss Churchill, what do you think of all that?"

Polly, really interested, looked up, and answered earnestly, "I can understand it perfectly. But still, you will forgive me saying so, it is not a happy state, nor a right one. It must have been mistake on all sides."

"You think so?" he answered. "Then perhaps you are right. I dare say you are. But what would you have a man do, so late?"

"Change!" said Polly, enthusiastically. "Late?—nothing is too late in life. I am sure if you tried the world with a little kindness, you would get a little in return. I would be less of a soldier," and Polly stopped in some confusion, "and more of a rational being."

"Complimentary, I must say."

Mr. Churchill, again left out of the conversation, protested, "What, Polly? You are talking of what you don't understand. Don't mind her, Major Grainger."

"Talking of what you don't understand," repeated the major, looking at him; "please don't interrupt us. Very well, Miss Polly. I shall think over what you have said. Perhaps I have made some such resolution already, and am going to change, and turn over a new leaf. You will help me, with your good wishes and prayers, for I feel I am a strange being. Good-bye. I must be going now—go back to my rude barrack-room, to my friends,

that is, my books ; they are the best, having no humours, and showing no ingratitude, though you break their very backs."

Mr. Churchill remained a few moments in a sort of rumination of delight after he had gone. He sat complacently before his fire. "Now, my good child," he said, "what do you say to your father?—what do you say to knowing something of the world? Do I know how to play him? I picked him out at once—I had an instinct that day he was the very man. I tell you what, that man can do what he likes with that bishop ; and if he chooses to say, 'Make Churchill archdeacon,' the other 'll have to do it. Of course we must begin with something smaller. Get me my 'Clerical Guide,' and let us see what the man *has* to give."

"Indeed, papa," said Polly, fetching the volume, "you are very clever—I admire you for it."

Mr. Churchill looked at her triumphantly. Such natures concession or homage or praises only inflame. "Oh, that's all very well *now*," he said ; "we must always have an argument. Now don't interrupt me ; I have letters to write."

And Polly, now full of her own folly and uselessness, as compared with the stupendous genius of her father, went away softly to her room.





CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MESS DINNER.

BUT the excitement in the house knew no bounds when in a day or two arrived a letter by the morning mail,—almost lost in a crowd of bills, circulars, and replies from deans, chaplains, &c.—from the Carabinier barracks. It was from the major, and addressed to Polly; and said that, as many of their officers were gone away on leave to the races, he had asked his relative the bishop to “a quiet little dinner.” “And,” wrote the major, “as I know Mr. Churchill is consumed with a strong and most natural desire to meet that saintly man, Dr. Talboys, my relative, he will have an opportunity of doing so, if he will do me the honour of dining with me to-morrow. And how pleasant it would be if one was able to have the company of Miss Polly Churchill also. (Polly noticed that the major took a sort of pleasure in sounding the chimes on her name, and brought it in wherever he could.) But our delightful mess regulations, founded on the army rules and orders at Otaheite and

the Sandwich Isles, prevent this. I have to go now and hear the day charges, in a very bad humour, which I suppose the prisoners will get the benefit of."

Mr. Churchill had of course opened and read this down long before Polly even heard. Indeed, it was only by the thought of Bridget, who used to look at the directions of the letters as she took them at the door, that her young mistress knew that any had come for her. But Polly, with that surprising sweetness which was her nature and *herself*, had grown to accept this as almost the regular order of nature, and that the accident of a letter being addressed to her was a mere form of society. Of course there might be answers; so at times she came to look among the loose papers, pick up any that might be for her, and thus save her father the trouble of answering them.

Mr. Churchill on this occasion a little resented this invitation not being addressed to him. He was not in the least "put out" with the major, but, as usual, laid the fault to his daughter's account. "Always pushing herself forward," he thought, "always coming in my way and throwing me back!" But still the prospect of meeting the bishop soon filled his soul to the exclusion of any such petty feeling. It was years since he had met a bishop at dinner—long, long ago, before he had settled down in "that hole" at Cumberley. He sat long in his study, composing the picture. He saw himself (he had fortunately passed through the mess-room, so he had the background well present to him) in that pleasant scene—placed himself now at the top, next the bishop—now op-

posite—a little round table—the officers being away—and the most agreeable unconventional flow of soul. He should take care that the major should give his lordship a short sketch or so of what the clerical guest was. The rest he would undertake himself. But what was his brief? Mr. Churchill could smile contemptuously at the imaginary and ignorant questioner standing before him in his study, and he could lift up the lid of his desk and draw out the week's issue of the *Cumberley Mercury*—which contained the full report of his lordship's speech at the meeting; passages of which had been diligently scored up and down. One passage indeed had a line drawn all round it so:—

“Charities of this description are much to be encouraged: and the quality of mercy should not be strained, but keep dropping away like the gentle dew.”

A passage which the *Cumberley Mercury* said should be written in letters of gold on the waistcoat of every Christian man. “Our soldiers,” the bishop had said, in another place, give us their wounds and privations—nay, their lives; and shall we not give a few doits in return?” (This appeal, some listeners remarked, was delivered with a half mournful, half smiling expostulation.) “Let us each—one and all” (woon an all, was the bishop's favourite pronunciation)—“give up some little luxury—our cigars, our racers, our betting—and the thing will come *very* light.”

Mr. Churchill refreshed his memory as he went along

in the train with these choice passages, and arrived at the barracks about half-an-hour before the dinner hour.

He heard voices; the bishop was already arrived. This made him uncomfortable. The major was there.

"Oh, how do you do?" he said. "You are in good time. Let me introduce the Rev. Mr. Churchill, from Cumberley."

"Ah, Cumberley," said the bishop; "nice spot—in Dr. Brindley's patrimony, I think. Good fishing, I am told, there."

Mr. Churchill abased himself as low as the code of western society allowed. The absurd conventions of European salutation would be a little shocked by the lifting of a buckled shoe, and planting it on one's head: otherwise——. Still he could be eagerly reverential, and say:

"No, my lord, we have not the benefit of your lordship's supervision at Cumberley. Most heartily do I wish we had."

"Then I do not, my dear Sir. I have quite enough to do without having my diocese enlarged; the work is enough for two. And tell me now, Grainger, how is dear Mary getting on with her husband? Will she get him office, do you think?"

"I don't know, indeed," said the major, bluntly, "and don't want to know any of their doings. They are good enough to write to me about every six months, telling me that there is a new child, or that an old one is sick, or

some such interesting news; and I acknowledge the letters, and tell them we have flogged Maddox, or given Jones the cells and bread-and-something—that will be as interesting to them.”

“Ha, ha, ha!” laughed the bishop, with a low, quiet laugh. “You have a way of your own, I see, Grainger.”

“Perhaps I have,” said the major. “I am sorry you can’t stay with us to-day.”

Mr. Churchill gave a start, almost of agony, the most natural and genuine thing he had done for a long time.

“His lordship not staying to dinner! Oh, surely——”

“I knew you’d be disappointed,” said Major Grainger.

“Why, you know, I should have liked it. But young Ffolliott, a very charming young son of Sir Thomas—you know them, Grainger?”

“I don’t, indeed,” said the major, calmly.

“I thought you did; no matter. You see, he turned up unexpectedly. And how do you get on down there, Mr. Churchill? I am sure a pleasant, peaceful retreat. Ah, dear me!”

Mr. Churchill was a little embarrassed as to the choice of a fitting answer.

“I get away sometimes, my lord; on rare occasions. The other day I had a little holiday, and went to that soldiers’ meeting. Oh, my lord, those golden words are still ringing in my ear: ‘Let us each, one and all, give up our racers, our betting and our cigars.’ Ah, that was the way to put it; it went home to them. Another,

Major Grainger, knowing less of the human heart, would have——”

“Oh, I know, I know,” said the bishop, rising up promptly, and laying hold of a noble “shovel,” to which Mr. Churchill’s adoring eyes had often wandered—he would not have seized it so. “It is very easy to take hold of one’s words. But I was perfectly correct. Those are the luxuries that should be given up. But there are really no bounds to the profane licentiousness of the press.”

Major Grainger laughed, not at the bishop, but the almost wild bewilderment of his guest, who looked from one to the other in a sort of terrified amazement. He hadn’t taken hold of the bishop’s words: how had *he* been licentious?

“Good-morning, Sir,” said the bishop, shortly. “God bless you, Grainger. Don’t come down, now.”

When Grainger returned he laughed again.

“You made a little mistake there,” he said.

“Mistake!” said the clergyman. “Did I? I meant nothing—indeed, no. Shall I run after him and explain?”

“He’s half-way to the station now. Pity you don’t look into the papers now and then. The *Chronicle* of this place—or some such paper—has been pitching into that very passage of his speech: saying how easy it was for bishops to preach giving charity from savings out of cigars, which they don’t smoke, and racers, which they don’t keep.”

“Oh, how shocking—how infamous!” said the clergyman, thinking of the paper.

"'Pon my word, I think they were quite right. Will you excuse me while I get into my shell jacket? The others will drop in presently."

The clergyman was left alone, much "put out" but not at all with himself. "Always the way"—this was the train of thought in his mind—"she never thinks of anything. I must do everything myself. Another girl with brains would have seen to that, and got all the newspapers, and the right ones. But of course I must do everything myself." Then his mind wandered away to the bishop. He was a man of the world. How well he knew about Cumberley and the fishing! Young Ffolliott from the University was of course a fisherman, or rowed, or did something. How long Polly would be before she thought of that! He would write when he got home: "My Lord, your lordship's young friend, whom your lordship mentioned," &c. Then in the body of the letter he could go off on this topic: "No one knows better than I do the character of the venal hirelings who infest our press," &c. In fact it was better it had fallen out so; and by the time he had concluded his letter and signed himself in imagination "Your Lordship's profound admirer and faithful servant," he was in good humour again. There was a picture over the chimney-piece which attracted him, a very gentle-looking young girl, with a soft and spiritual face, and an air of resignation and suffering. He was no connoisseur of such things: and indeed had no appreciation of such delicate shades of thought. The idea in his mind was, what a foolish choice! *He* would have had a good photograph of a

bishop, large size, with a "shovel," on a little round table, and a signature,

"Yours sincerely,

"W. R. GRAVESEND."

Now came in two or three of the officers ready for dinner, and then the major himself and two more; "Pollock, our senior captain, Rev. Mr. Churchill; Webster," &c.

Mr. Churchill bowed shortly to all these gentlemen. He held them but poorly, for it must not be supposed that his was at all an obsequious nature. Save in that one direction, he gave himself no trouble, and, in truth, rather threw away opportunities.

The usual mess dinner set in. Major Grainger presided. "Colonel's away," he said, "gone on leave. Rather good the bishop and the cigars, eh?"

"How's that?" said Pollock, shortly.

"Mr. Churchill will tell you, and it's not a bad story either, I can tell you. I suspect the best part of the whole is that the bishop thinks you meant to give him a sly hit all the time."

"Tell us what it is," said Pollock.

Mr. Churchill coloured. "I think," he said, "in a mixed company——"

"Quite right," said the major gravely. "I stand reproved."

"A glass of champagne with you, Mr. Churchill," said Captain Pollock, who was a bluff, round-faced officer of the common cavalry type. "I know a little about the

bishops, and hear enough, God knows, when I have to put in my week with the dean."

"Ah, yes, my friend," said another officer, with a sort of confidential enjoyment, "enough about that."

The word seemed to soothe Mr. Churchill like a charm.

"Is your uncle Dean Pollock, of the South Missions?" he said, with great interest.

"No, not he; or he may be, for all I know; he's Dean of Peckham."

Mr. Churchill's face fell. He knew nothing of Peckham.

"Oh, indeed! Peckham, to be sure; and you stop with him? Dear me."

"You may say that!" said the captain. "It has to be done for family reasons. Not a bad fellow; good wine enough; but the prayers—oh, my! Not that I object to that in reason, you know."

"I say, Bob," a yellow-haired cornet said, still in the low tone of confidence so common among officers, "it don't improve you, though. You come back an awful sinner."

"Well, but I say in reason, you know. It's not meant to be pushed more; and at half-past seven, sharp—that would do you good, my boy."

Captain Pollock had now quite forgotten his guest, and had got into that friendly and secret confidence with his fellows which is rather a failing of his profession.

"I say, that morning when I came in late——"

"Ah! you don't forget that." "Serve you right, my lad." "That touched you up." (These were the half-masonic, half-enjoying encouragements that greeted the captain.)

"Well, I did feel awkward: and so would any of you, when a man looks up from his book, and puts his glass to his eye, and looks at you hard until you stumble into your seat, and with all the maids tittering."

("Ah, my friend, more of that would do you good!" "Six times in the week! You want it well!" These were fresh expressions of approval, and which seemed to gratify the captain, who was a "good" and good-humoured fellow, and much liked. Such are usually shown in this way how popular they are.)

In the meantime they had travelled a long way for Mr. Churchill, who was looking from one to the other, "quite outside the joke."

Grainger saw it. He was a little outside also.

"This must be all very interesting to a stranger, eh?" he said, sourly. "Let us get up some stable talk, now, as a change. Let Buxton there talk of his last fence and cropper, and all that."

"Well, I am sure it's as sensible as the things some fellows like to talk of," said Buxton, giving a cutting retort.

"Or, I say, Grainger!" said Pollock, colouring, "tell us about the fellow you gave the cells to; that will be interesting!"

"I never talk shop," said Grainger, coolly. "I think it a bad compliment to a guest. Have some more

champagne, Mr. Churchill? Have you met our chaplain, Macpherson,—chaplain to the garrison?"

"No," said Mr. Churchill; "not had that pleasure."

"You ought to know him; you'd like him,—a good, hard-working man," &c.

But Mr. Churchill was a little *distract*. The clang of "the Dean of Peckham" was still in his ear.

"I suppose he is likely to be a bishop one day?" said the clergyman, blandly.

"Who?" the captain asked.

"The dean; your relation."

"God bless you, no!" said the captain, laughing as if it was a capital joke.

"Make him a bishop? I say, Bob, when he has the silk apron, only think of that——!"

Bob said that would be a rare notion; and some one else laughed, and said, "There'll be a chance for you, Pollock, my boy!" all which were obscure and unintelligible allusions, and distressed Mr. Churchill, who got no explanation of the just cause or impediment why the dean should not be made a bishop.

By-and-by they moved into the ante-chamber. There they had coffee. Mr. Churchill, now in great and placid good-humour, stood, with his coffee-cup in his hand, and one foot on the fender, and looked up at the picture.

"I see," he said, with a sort of knowing air, "this is—come now—eh?"

Pollock struck in hastily, "Yes, well painted. There is a book of photographs over there; everyone of us, and our horses too."

Mr. Churchill had still his eyes on the picture, turning his spoon slowly.

"I can guess, I think—eh! Captain Pollock? the bishop has either a daughter or niece, eh? Very suspicious, I think."

Pollock touched his arm and frowned.

Grainger struck in impatiently, "It's a relation of mine, who is dead now," and then walked away noisily to the window.

Mr. Churchill had address enough not to appear discomfited, but continued staring at the picture, and stirring his spoon in the same mechanical way. He then shook his head, and made that peculiar "tsz, tsz, tsz!"—the accredited sound of vexation, or disappointment, or deep sympathy.

From an irreverent source over on the sofa came that short nasal spasm which comes from suppressed laughter, and where the yellow-haired cornet was struggling with merriment; but he did not notice it.

("I never saw such a cool old duffer," said the youth afterwards talking over the scene. "The way he rolled his eyes, and shook his head, as if he had known the girl!")

Grainger came up to him abruptly.

"It seems inhospitable, but I must tell you, if you are going back by the night train, there isn't much time."

All now rose, and Mr. Churchill reluctantly bade his adieus. The major went down with him into the courtyard. It was a fine moonlight night. He said, irresolutely:

"If you wish I can speak to the bishop, and explain that little mistake. He is a man of the world, you know."

"To be sure, to be sure ; I saw that ; but I think *I'd* better manage it."

(He said this with an inexpressibly knowing air.)

"Oh ! just as you like ; just as you please ! By the way, when will you come over, again ? You might bring Miss Polly some morning. She would like to hear our band. She said something like it."

"Oh ! dear no !" said the clergyman. "She never thinks of such a thing. A mere hermit, Sir ; never asks to go beyond the little gate. She has plenty to do there."

"But you can't tell exactly," said the major, coldly. "Just ask her, and give her the message, please."

"Oh, certainly—certainly. I'll make it a point ; but it will be no use."

"But it may be. We might fix a day for a lunch. There, you had better make haste. By the way, that picture over the chimney-piece — you were looking——"

"I was so sorry ; now really, you know, I didn't——"

"Just let me finish. I say, you did not notice any sort of a likeness ?"

"A likeness ?" said the clergyman rapidly, and desperately scouring his memory for all the possible persons who might be connected with Grainger. "To whom ?"

"To anyone ?" said he, impatiently.

Could it be the bishop?—yet he was afraid to hazard it.

“Oh! you did not, that’s evident. It’s no matter. Good-night; don’t let me keep you.”





CHAPTER XXIV.

THE MAJOR'S QUARTERS.

GLORIOUS days succeeded, full of hope and fairy-like dreams. A letter, according to the pattern arranged, was sent to the bishop, which was duly acknowledged in a very short note, flourished by the clergyman to his daughter as a triumph of his diplomacy. He did not know that the major had seen his relative in the meantime.

But there were some curious matters going on at Cumberley. The gossips had noticed that on one day the works had been stopped altogether abruptly, and had been resumed almost as abruptly about the noon of the next. There were whisperings among the overseers, and the last reliable information was that young Burgess had gone off at a few minutes' notice, having been suddenly telegraphed for. The Grundys sent abroad a hundred solutions, not one of which approached the truth. So sudden had been his departure.

that even Polly had not heard it, and he had not time to come and tell her.

On that very day both had set out for Irnstone. The major had written in a sort of peremptory way to Mr. Churchill, in a tone, too, which he could not mistake—not unlike the plain requirements of a writ—ordering him to ask Miss Polly to come some morning and lunch. Still he understood, as he thought, the *arrière pensée* of all this. The officer could not be always pressing *him* to come; there would be something too remarkable: and supposing that the bishop came, it was not unlikely to be a delicate way of handing the bishop, as it were bodily over to him, and avoiding the *gêne* of the host having to sit by unengaged. As for Polly, she was greatly pleased at this new expedition, and not a little grateful to the major for his homage and gallantry; for it must not be taken that she was one of the helpless Griseldas who think a trained indifference to amusement to be a part of their virtue, and who affect a kind of ignorance at any of the usual homage from the other sex. Polly was shrewd enough, and was not at all displeased—as what lady ever is?—at exciting admiration, or even love. So she went up and dressed herself in her prettiest and tiniest bonnet and best finery, to do credit and honour to the day.

When they got to the barracks, the major was there. He received them with a grim gladness. He looked downwards on Polly, and seemed to address her always, and wait for her answers, as though she was a pretty and piquant child.

"It is very good of you to come in this way. We have nothing to show you—no lions—nothing—nothing."

"My dear Sir," said Mr. Churchill, "after one of the most agreeable evenings I ever spent——"

"Ah, that's another view altogether."

Mr. Churchill was thinking of the bishop.

He not a lion!

"Come in here," said the major, opening a door, "this is the riding-school."

And Polly peeped timorously into a great gloomy barn, where a young fellow, on a great strong horse, was plunging round, being chased up and down to a torrent of "Can-tarr" "Keep well back in sad'll;" and a perfect series of such barks.

The major's eyes flashed as he looked on, and he strode up to the riding-master. "That's the fellow I saw last week, and he hasn't made the least advance. He does it on purpose, I think."

The horse was stopped, the rider was called over, and the major spoke in a low and angry tone to him, and then came back to her.

Polly saw lowering glances and contemptuous looks following him, which alarmed her.

"I'll break them in," said the major, returning to her. "I give them no more than I have received myself."

"Quite right," said Mr. Churchill, "an excellent maxim. You are a man of the world I see, Major Grainger."

The major seemed to care very little for this adhesion. He was watching Polly, who made no remark. "That's

our strong watch-house," he said, as they passed another door. "I take care to keep it well filled. I find it is the only plan. Don't you think so?"

Polly looked up at him, with the most natural confidence in the world. "I do not believe it, since you ask me," she said; "not since your goodness to that soldier the other day."

"Oh, as for that," he said, hastily, "I had particular reasons—whims guide us in most things."

Polly's face became grave and even sad. "Oh! if that were the case—" she said, and stopped.

"Well?" he said, with great interest.

Polly coloured.

"What would happen?" he asked, with greater interest.

Mr. Churchill must have been the dullest and most selfish of men not to have a glimpse of how the major felt towards Polly, and was listening with a little wonder.

They were now at the major's rooms. Polly was delighted with the furniture and the quantity of little machinery and devices, which give an officer's room the air of a "tidy" old curiosity shop. Even the row of sticks, hung on straps on the wall, was new to her. There was a little piquant lunch laid out—but alas! no bishop.

Polly had walked up to the chimney-piece and noticed the picture. The major was watching her. She was immensely interested and even touched by its expression, and was just saying, "Who is this—," when she checked herself; her eyes were cast down on the ground, and

the colour came into her cheeks. The infinite tact of woman had served her, even though a little late ; and she saw that it was a matter that might be painful to ask about.

But the major said, "What were you going to ask about, Miss Polly?"

Polly did not answer, and looked at him in greater confusion.

Her father interposed hastily ; he thought the major was displeased. "Such foolish questions as you put, Polly!" he said,—“asking a gentleman about such private matters. Really, you are too curious.”

“Upon my word that is as good a thing as I have heard some time,” said the major, scornfully. “Some one else put the same question the other night, as well as I recollect.” Then turning to Polly, he said, “Some other time I will tell you about it, not now ; only answer me this, has any likeness in it struck you?”

Polly concentrated all her attention on it, and smoothing her hair reflectively, hesitated a little before answering. “You will laugh at me,” she said, smiling, “if I tell you what I think. But really the colour of the hair, and the general look, and shape of the face——”

“And the eyes?” he said.

“I cannot say about that,” said Polly gravely.

“I see we both mean the same person,” said he. “Never mind, another time.”

All this “intrigued” Mr. Churchill, restlessly trying to be “taken in” in some way to their understanding.

They then sat down to lunch. No bishop. The

major was more gracious than he had ever been before. Polly, undoing her bonnet-strings, gave way to confidence, and spoke out her thoughts with a charming *naïveté* and naturalness. Suddenly a knock came to the door. The major rose up impatiently, with a "They always come worrying here!" and went to the door. Mr. Churchill looked uneasily after, and peered hard to see out. There might be some shape of bishop on the landing.

Major Grainger was a long time away. He came back at last very hastily. "I am sorry," he said, "to have to go. But with me everything falls out awkwardly. There is some news come in of importance, and the general of the district has telegraphed for me. The colonel is away, so I must go at once. Good-bye, Miss Polly. You must give us another day; and if you cannot," he added, turning to Mr. Churchill, "I shall write to you. However the business turns out," he said to Polly; with meaning, "I shall write to you—to-night." Then he went away, and they returned home.





CHAPTER XXV.

HARRY'S SENTENCE.

THAT night father and daughter were sitting together, the clergyman busy as usual, and Polly wondering a little that she had not seen her friend, when he entered a little suddenly.

Mr. Churchill looked displeased. He had latterly felt a great change within him towards this young man, which he owned he could not account for, and one of the Grundys of the parish asking him on the mysterious stoppage of the works, he said, in a very meaning half-pathetic way, "Do you know he is not exactly—er—what I thought him," and looked displeased. As he later remarked, he did not relish "that come-here, come-go style of thing" in another man's house. Breaking in on a family after their meals without invitation was rather too free and easy. "Well," he said, drily, "what's the news now?"

His real pain, distress and embarrassment were evident to Polly. "Dear Harry," she said anxiously, "something has happened, I know."

Mr. Churchill looked up from his "Clerical Guide." Even the wisest are stirred by curiosity. "Speak out," he said. "What's wrong now?"

The young man was very pale. "Oh, Sir," he said, "and Miss Churchill, misfortunes have come upon us. I have just heard from home. My poor father."

Polly's eyes swam with sympathy. "Not ill; not dying, Harry!" she said. "Sit down; you are not well. You know that you have friends here, and how we feel for you."

"No, thank God," said he, "but that may come, and is sure to come after. It is what he thinks worse than the loss of life."

"For God's sake come to the point," said Mr. Churchill testily, and turning down a page in his "Clerical Guide." "Of course we feel for you."

"No, it is his affairs,—what I have been dreading so long. He is ruined, utterly ruined. He will not have a shilling after all his hard weary life,—and labouring, as I know, worse than the commonest navvy he employed."

There was a silence for a moment. The sweet comforting voice of Polly struck in with consolation. "It will not be so bad as you think. Cheer up, Harry, and have hope. There will be something saved — there always is—and he can start again. They always magnify things at first."

Her father turned on her testily. Don't talk such folly, child. How can you tell? I am sure we are as sorry as anyone. But it is the old story. I have been prepared for it this many a day. I have said so a hundred times.

It all falls into the regular way of trade. If you go into these enormous undertakings, you must run the risk of failing in this enormous way. Contractors always fail in the end; and we are very sorry, sorry as anyone, but we can't help the matter. And now, Burgess, what do you propose about yourself? I suppose there is some plan. Eh?"

The young man looked at them both, and began to plead, rather than speak, very earnestly.

"That is what I came to speak about, Sir. I have to go away to-night."

"To-night!" said Polly.

"Yes; and I have only a few minutes left. I was here before; but that—you were gone to that man."

"Major Grainger of the Carabiniers," said Mr. Churchill, with dignity.

"I could not bear to come in. I am going away, and shall not be able to return for a long—long time. I know not what is to become of me. Some friends have spoken of an engineer's place on some railway—out in the colonies or in India. It does not make much matter where, so that there is work to be done—night or day—and money to be made; it is all I care for."

"Quite right, and very proper," said the clergyman. "We wish you every success in whatever direction you go."

"Now," said the young man, desperately, "I come to what I wish to speak of. You can assist me, Sir, in the only thing that will sustain me in all that is to be before me."

"How?" said Mr. Churchill, gravely. "This comes

on me with surprise. Surely you know how we are now; that I have not been at all treated in the way my services have merited. Though, of course, by-and-by something may turn up. But——”

“It's not *that*, papa,” said Polly. “Indeed he does not mean that.”

“Then, what the deuce——” began the clergyman, turning on him.

“You must have seen, Sir, long before this,” he went on hurriedly, “what has been going on here. I should have spoken before, but foolishly put it off until this fatal business. Although I have had the one hope before my eyes, she—your daughter—has long before this understood me; and I, if it is not too much presumption to say so, seem to have understood her. And if you approve, and hold out even a chance, I should be content to wait years of struggle and suffering.”

He saw the confounded look, astonishment, anger, coldness, and impatience rising into the clergyman's face.

“Then you need do nothing of the kind, Sir,” said the latter, with great heat. “Upon my word, a pretty proposal! And this is what you come to speak about! Do you take me for a common fool, Sir? I saw nothing of the kind going on under my eyes, Sir, as you say; and I think it was unwarrantable and a great liberty, your carrying on such a business.”

“Oh, papa,” said Polly, imploringly and softly, “only think of what has happened, and don't speak harshly to him.”

“But I will. I say it was a liberty, and a very great

piece of deception in you, Ma'am. But I don't want to discuss the matter, or look at it at all in any way. It's quite too absurd; and, really, for a person in your condition, ushering it all in with the piece of good news you have just mentioned, is almost ludicrous. I simplify the matter at once. I assume you are hardly serious, and decline the whole thing as not to be thought of, and never was to be thought of. I must say it is a very poor return altogether for the friendly treatment you have received in our house—very."

Polly again interposed.

"He meant for the best, papa; I know he did. He had no intention of offending you."

"I should hope not," said the clergyman, sarcastically; "that would be a strange way of recommending himself."

"But," said the young man, warmly, "in a matter like this, which affects all her future happiness, you will surely leave something to her decision? This is too sacred a matter to be dealt with in this sort of fashion. Forgive me, Sir, if I speak freely; but——"

"I do not forgive you, Sir; and I think you quite forget yourself. Do you come to lecture me about sacred matters, me, a clergyman of the Church of England? I must beg all this will stop at once. She knows her duty to me thoroughly. I don't mean her to be disposed of in this way. I have quite other views for her. Not to be thought of for a moment, Sir. And now," added the reverend gentleman, looking at his watch, "if you are going by to-night's train,—I am sorry, of course, to part with you in this way——"

The young man drew himself up, quite overcome with grief and surprise.

"Just one word more, Sir," he said. "If I should return—if wealth and fortune——"

"Now, my good friend, dismiss it altogether. I may as well tell you the plain naked truth ; I have another arrangement ; in fact, the matter is all but settled. So you see," added he, resuming the "*Clerical Guide*," "in *any* case the thing could not be dreamed of. You have our best wishes, of course, and all that. Good-bye. Very sorry, indeed."

Without a word more the young man bowed and went out. Polly, looking after him, went out also.

The reverend gentleman was left to his "*Guide*," saying aloud—

"What work it is ! A bankrupt contractor !"





CHAPTER XXVI.

THE MAJOR'S SENTENCE.

SOON Polly returned—not weeping or agitated—but with a sad and deeply sympathising face.

“Look here,” said her father suddenly, “I am glad this has all happened, as I was going to tell you something. Proposing to wait here for him all the best years of your life, while he is scraping some money together! No! The major has behaved in a very handsome way,—the bishop and all; and he really quite likes you, and proposes to marry you. There is news for you! We settled it all off like men of business, in a quarter of an hour.”

Polly indeed started at this news.

“Oh, papa,” she said, excited, “you can hardly ask me to do that! You know I would do anything for you and for *them*,” she motioned; “but this is *such* a step.”

The clergyman turned round in his chair full on her. “What is this?” he said. “What d’ye mean? Are you going on with folly too? D’ye mean to tell me that you

have been plotting with that pauper who went out now ? If you have been getting up any sickly romance of that sort, I vow to Heaven——”

Polly answered, gently :

“I did, and do like poor Harry more than anyone ; but, of course, I should not think of him after what you said to-night.”

“A fine sacrifice you can make, Miss !” said he. “Your father prevents you making a fool of yourself.”

“But then, papa, to marry him—a man that I have seen twice, and that I could never like—that is so different. Don’t ask me ; do not, dearest papa. I will stay with you and *them* for all my life, and try and be as useful as I can ; but it is too hasty—too sacred a thing.”

“Sacred ! Oh, he has been teaching you all that, has he ? You can teach your father, a licensed clergyman of England, what is sacred—eh ? ’Pon my word, fine nice times we live in ! But see here, my good Miss ! I am not going to be entertained with any more of this folly. You must just do it, and make up your mind. I have settled it with the gentleman, and don’t want any more talking about it. I am your father—and your guardian in law—and you not of age. You must try and learn to be a little unselfish ; and, if it is a little sacrifice, it’s no more than thousands of children do every day—and little enough you can do for your unfortunate packhorse, slaving himself all his life to keep a roof over your head—you, and all the set up stairs ; working, working, from morn till night. And now this little chance, when I

may get something that will get me my poor glass of wine (which I want, God knows), you, of course, get up your love-sick folly, as if you were some chit at school, instead of a grown-up woman that should have sense. No; but it's always this way; no co-operation, no co-operation; and you'd have me just beginning again, and slaving for the whole set, dragging on on this workhouse pittance, provided *you* have your bit of milk and water romance! It's always been the way—always."

Polly had been listening to this rambling tirade, with eyes gradually opening. Without intending it, he had for once been diplomatic and blundered on to the most suitable motives that could sway her mind. There was one always irresistible, and which he unconsciously set out with great force and in strong light—the picture of himself toiling miserably—the overburdened father of a family struggling to support his little family above, and receiving no aid. The very piteousness of this picture, her own crying *selfishness* and want of sacrifice, came before Polly. It struck a pang to her gentle breast, as it had done many times before. She saw her dear darling father worn—which he was not—going "down town" wearily on his hopeless errands, writing, writing, to this holy man and that, and all for *her*. In her eyes he was at that moment, by a sort of filial delusion, a kind of sweet and amiable Vicar of Wakefield. She could not hesitate, as indeed she had never hesitated, when such a picture was before her; and, with tears in her eyes, she became submissive to her dear parent.

That good man got into famous spirits in a moment.

"My dear girl, it will be new life for us all. I shall make Major Grainger get me to be the old bishop's chaplain—a thing that's never been enough worked as yet. The chaplain ought to be more powerful than the bishop himself. He really disposes of his patronage. There was that man in Ireland used to get all his chaplains to be bishops, one after the other. Good gracious me," he added, reflectively, as if dazzled with his prospects, "it is wonderful! But there is more jobbing done over there." This he said very wistfully. "A chaplaincy will do very well to begin with, until something *fat* falls in. He can always have his pick, and stop it *in transitu*. Now, my good child, you see what it is to have a clever, pushing father. There is no doing anything without it. Some people would be content to "hole" on here all their days, like rabbits in a burrow. You see what I have made of it. I have always tried to work for my children. There you are, established *splendidly*, I may say, while indirectly I have taken some little care of myself."

Polly listened to all this self-laudation with a sad face, that was bent down over her work, and saying occasionally, "Yes, papa; yes, papa." About an hour went by. Suddenly they heard a step on the little short gravel walk, and the wooden gate flapped to noisily. A visitor. It was nine o'clock. They heard a gruff man's voice in the hall, and Bridget came in, full of flutter and alarm, to say there was "a soldier man" in the hall with a letter, and he wanted a receipt and an answer. There was actually such a tall warrior blocking up the little narrow entrance, almost brushing both sides with his uniform.

He certainly would have found it hard to pass the clock. He seemed a gigantic Noah's Ark man, from the smallness of his jacket and the length of his figure. The letter he brought was from Major Grainger, and addressed to Polly. Her father, as a matter of course, took it as being addressed to him, and opened and read it to *himself* first. Then, as a sort of *arrière pensée*, read her snatches of it, with many a "Dear me!"

It ran :—

"IRNSTON BARRACKS.

"MY DEAR MISS POLLY,—I find that very great news has come in of new disturbances in India, and something like a rising among the blacks. Troops are to go out at once, and I have to set off for London this very night. The regiment is to leave in a few days at furthest, but I shall not be able to return.

"You have heard by this time of the formal proposal I made to your father. As he assures me that your consent is certain, it would seem unnecessary at such a moment to trouble you. Your father affects to settle all concerns of the household. I take, therefore, his assurance. I suppose he knows, or is assumed to know, what is best for his children's interest.

"You will say that this is a strange way to go about this matter. So it is. And I am a strange being, I know. Will you forgive my being brief and coming to the point, by telling you that from the first time I saw you I felt that *you* were the one who were to influence, if any one was to do so, my life. I felt that *you*, if you would

care to take the trouble, might be the means of changing me from—ah, well—what I am, to one who might be taught to do good—to live happily, with heart sympathies and affections, and die happily at the end. For even the short time I have known you I have felt this influence.

“May I say too that I have an instinct that this step will be best for your interest, as I believe for mine? You are very young, and in so important a thing, wiser heads, such as perhaps you consider your father, may advantageously decide for you; at all events you love him. It was never intended that you were to spend your whole life as a sort of upper nurse—a higher and broader path is opening for you. This, I say again, will seem a strange way of writing on such a matter; but your father has already so simplified the business, it will be much shorter to deal with it in this way. Time—and a soldier's time—will not allow of the usual formulas and more delicate approaches.

“Simply, then, I ask for an answer by the bearer to this question: First,—Do you accept the proposal I made? Second,—Would you be willing to wait for two or three years, when I shall be free and done with the army for ever in one shape or another—above ground or under ground?

“Believe me,

“Dear Miss Polly,

“Yours truly,

“ROBERT GRAINGER.”

“I don't understand all this,” said the clergyman

testily. "Going away—that's quite another thing. What does the man mean? and the bishop—oh!"

He had turned over the page; there was a postscript. It ran:

"I am now going to write a letter to the bishop about your father. He will be giving an episcopal dinner, such as the apostles used to give, in a few days, and he shall ask your father. In due time I shall press his claims on him; but that will be a good beginning——"

The reverend gentleman was only half satisfied with this arrangement. Still, after dinner, when episcopal wine had annealed as it were, the human heart, there was no knowing what might be done. He would get next him. Besides, if the major did not work zealously, according to his engagement, *his* contract need not be fulfilled.

"To be sure. Now get your pen and write. Tell him, all that will suit excellently; something in that way, you know."

"What! I must write now?" said Polly with a start, and a woeful face. "Oh! so sudden!"

"Of course, unless you want me to give bed and board to that fellow in the hall."

She had soon written her answer, and was putting it up, when her father called out:

"Come! show it to me, Miss."

He read it.

"What is all this?" he said, angrily. "'My duty to

tell you—affections have been— but I shall try—' Rubbish! You're a fool, child; sit down and write it over again. Go now. Wasting my paper; nice work it is."

Polly answered with excitement:

"I can't, papa—indeed I can't. I *must* tell the truth in such a matter as this."

"What d'ye mean?" said the clergyman rising up excitedly. "Are *you* going to beard me in this way?"

"No, no, no, papa," said Polly, more excited still. "I would do anything for you, and I show it; for I make this dreadful sacrifice for you and for *them*; but I *must* have my way in this. It is only right and proper he should know all this—know what is the truth—that it is a mere matter of bargain and sale. And I hope it will be for the best," faltered she, "and I do it with all my heart for you and them."

Much taken aback by this burst—for, as he often said, he hated a scene and fuss of any kind—the reverend gentleman could only half grumble that he wanted nothing done for *him*—that nothing ever *had* been done for him—and that it was her own concern, and that he washed his hands of it. (How many times did he go through this figurative ablution, which indeed amounted to the direct contrary, being a signal that he did *not* wash his hands of the particular matter.)

"Yes, papa, I shall go through with it. You may depend on me; but I *must* send this as it is. He will like me the better for it. Here," she went on folding it hurriedly, "Bridget, give this to the soldier."

Her father still grumbled, "Oh, of course; you have

your own way. Lecture your father; see how it will end. Nice daughter you are, and I have to find wits for you all."

The soldier went his way, bearing the letter; and within an hour the major received it. Thus on that night was this odd proposal of marriage made and accepted. Up stairs among the little crowded population, Polly lay awake, miserable and tossing; and at last, towards morning, fell wearily into a doze. Her father sat, long below at the fire, before retiring to his snug room to the right, where he alone was entitled to a fire; and in a sort of dreamy abstraction made endless pictures. Grouping himself and the bishop in a ceaseless variety of attitudes, he heard the bishop's voice, sweet and melodious:

"My dear Churchill, old Benbow is failing fast. We shall certainly take care of you."

Then his eye settled abstractedly on his own hat, the brim of which gradually widened into the noble and flowing sinuosity of the *true* and only brim. Sweet wishing cap! Had he found a stray one, lost or forgotten, he would have taken it home reverently, and put it under glass, like Napoleon's at the Louvre. He went to rest that night convinced of his own masterly diplomacy. His sleep and dreams were delightful. Above, Polly scarcely slept; she had the image of her poor ruined lover before her—the honest, open Harry—with this blow now to put to the others. Yet she could not dream but that it would be otherwise. Her father's sentence was a judge's, final, irrevocable.

But, it will be said, she could not be very deeply engaged in the matter, as she made so poor a struggle, and accepted the whole so complacently. But our heroine was young, full of life, and thought, and hope; and her faithful subjection to her father had given her a wonderful self-command and training. And again; what is so far off as two or three years may become three or four. Such a "long day" removes all the bitterness. On reflection, therefore, the matter will seem reasonable enough. To say nothing of the fact that Major Grainger was not *odious* or "*loathsome*" to her; and she had a sort of compassion for him, with a feeling too that he would never return.





CHAPTER XXVII.

THE BISHOP.

IN due course the gallant Carabiniers were put on board some very mean transports, huddled up with their horses—as the custom is—and sailed away to India in the hired troopship the *Pegasus*, hastily taken up with many others. For there was, indeed, a crisis, and no time to lose. A tremendous Sikh rebellion had broken out. Europeans were being massacred, and the empire was in danger. The gallant 14th Carabiniers, who had plenty of gold embroidered names upon their flag, had not been abroad for many years, and were the very first regiment to be hurried away. Some five hundred “sabres,” as they were fond of describing themselves; so many “officers and men;” so many “women and ladies”—(the reader will note the logical nicety of War Office English)—were all crammed into those “tubs,” and for weeks were miserable. Some of these honest fellows, going to certain death by sun-stroke, fever, or Indian musket, or scymitar, had their

sleep even served out to them like their biscuit and junk ; for they were so straitened for room below that the "ration" of sleep could only be taken in alternate spells, about a third of the number having to doze or walk about on the deck every second night. As for the two or three poor faithful women who went out in squalor, what business had they literally in that galley? Their suffering, and discomfort, and misery it would be hard to describe. But it has been the custom—and has always obtained—and so it will in all probability be to the end of time and of English war offices.

The horses, poor animals, were henceforth to endure life in a sort of frame, all under the command of Lieut.-Colonel Rignold, C.B., and Major Grainger. The *Pegasus* sailed away, and was not heard of for months.

At Cumberley quite a new life had set in for the family. The Reverend Mr. Churchill had lost not an hour in forwarding his friend's letter to the excellent Bishop Talboys, accompanied as of course by one of his own, beginning :

"MY LORD BISHOP,

"Before my friend, and your lordship's relation, Major Grainger, embarked on board the *Pegasus*, hired transport, he promised to procure for me the honour of your lordship's knowledge, and, may I add, friendship. Indeed, since the day when I was fortunate enough to hear a few words from those eloquent lips, I have absolutely longed to know more of one whom common rumour," &c. &c.

Bishop Talboys read this document with surprise and pettishness.

"How they do plague me!" he said to his chaplain. "Who is the fellow? Oh, I recollect."

"I shall write to him in the usual form," said the chaplain, about to endorse it on the back.

"No, no," said the bishop; "that will never do. I must be civil to him. That Grainger is so ill-regulated, really he knows no bounds in his behaviour. No, no; I suppose you may as well ask him here to dine to-morrow. We have that dean coming."

His lordship was at an hotel in the manufacturing town.

"Really, the way I am harassed and put out by these canvassers. Have you written to Sir John?"

"Yes, my lord."

When Mr. Churchill received his letter he tossed it carelessly over to the sad-faced Polly.

"There, young woman, read that! When will you come to know the world like that? This is looking like business at last."

And Polly and Bridget were kept hard at work all that day, getting ready articles for the clergyman's toilette.

"Silk button-over waistcoat!" said he, testily. "When will the girl get sense? Don't you know the man's Low—Low as his hat? Do you want to ruin me? My goodness, how I have to think, think, think, of everything."

In good time the clergyman set out by train, with a sort of rude evangelical air about him, which he knew would harmonise with the feelings of his host. He talked

all the way to the "distinguished prelate." He had looked out in his old Peerage, and found that before this high elevation, and as simple curate, he had written a thick pamphlet, called "Livings and Laymen." But that was five-and-thirty-years ago. There was no time to write to town; and even if there was, pamphlets wither in a week, and fall away like the leaves of a faded rose. Still he made many speculative compliments in the railway carriage, on the probable success of this production: "Your lordship is of course acquainted with Lord Buryshaft, that remarkable layman; a man that has had incomparable influence. There, my lord, we can have no objection to the junction of 'Livings and Laymen.'"

At the hotel was a pleasant little dinner arranged. Sir John had arrived. A dean was present, also a young man, son to some dignitary, and the Rev. Mr. Chewton, chaplain, and ecclesiastical breakwater and fender, as it were. Whenever the great episcopal paddle-boxes came drifting slowly up against some awkward granite corner, which might chafe or scrape them, Mr. Chewton insinuated himself quietly between, and "eased off" the great mass.

The bishop looked at the clergyman suspiciously, and even nervously, as the latter bore down upon him, with his hand half out, and a kind of bent reverential gait, as though he was going to prostrate himself. The baronet and the other guests looked on with a curious air. Mr. Churchill was beginning:

"My lord, I am so penetrated with your lordship's goodness. Our friend, Major Grainger——"

"Yes, yes," said the bishop; "to be sure—that is——"
The fender was softly swung over, between.

"You came over from Cumberley," said Mr. Chewton,
"by rail, of course? Good sound hard work, I am sure."
But the clergyman's eye was still devouring the bishop.

"His lordship knows," he said, "what that means; no
one better—no one has so much right to——"

"Oh, you belong to Cumberley?" struck in Sir John.
"Very poor land about there."

"Yes, yes, Sir; you are quite right," said Mr. Churchill,
plaintively, "poor in every way. One ceaseless struggle
from morning until night. But we live, all of us, some-
how—*just* live."

Dinner was announced. Mr. Churchill made a struggle
to get next the bishop; but by the dexterity of Mr.
Chewton was prevented. He, however, managed to
command him, as it were, advantageously from the other
side of the table. The bishop and baronet talked fluently
together. As each spoke, the eyes of the clergyman op-
posite rested on them, and his glance moved from one to
the other with a sort of smile of surprise and pleasure.
The baronet beginning—"Do you know, a most curious
thing, I"—Mr. Churchill was all astonishment, in antici-
pation. Then the bishop, in a placid, level, plaintive way,
saying he "thought we were hurrying to some sort of
cataclasm or other, which would eventually be a benefit
for our dear old England"—Mr. Churchill's features
betokened the most poignant sympathy and apprehension.
He was preparing at the first full stop, to concur hastily
—to add something to the effect that he had never so

much as thought of that before ; but that now, as the bishop demonstrated it, it was only too plain—when the fender was adroitly lowered and the great ship eased away from him. But Mr. Churchill held the chaplain very cheap and poorly. For the moment he had addressed the bishop very deferentially and discriminatingly—"As to a crisis, my lord, which is so present to your lordship's clear gaze, we have one comfort in the presence and assistance of men like the Earl of Buryshaft and others."

The bishop gave a little start, and said hastily, "Oh, no doubt, no doubt. He is said to be a very good man."

The chaplain struck in again. "And now who is your leading man at Cumberley?" Mr. Churchill turned and fixed a vacant eye on him. He was rather resenting these interruptions. The vacancy gave place to a twinkle of pleasure as he bent forward and girded himself up for what he had intended. "And as to the noble lord's influence in matters of patronage, we must say it is as happy a junction of 'Livings and Laymen' as took place in a certain quarter many years ago." Strange to say, the bishop coloured up and contracted his brows. His only answer was a sort of grunt, and a "Sir John—a glass of wine—here, waiter,"—this very testily—"champagne to Sir John." No one but the chaplain understood the compliment ; but they saw plainly how ill it had been received. Mr. Chewton again "fending off," said, "And how do you get on with your churchwardens?" Mr. Churchill, much confused, and sensible of a blunder somewhere, cast down his eyes.

Both allusions had been most unfortunate. The Reverend Mr. Talboys might have been a bishop certainly seven or eight years before the date of his promotion. But Lord Mountsheltie, his patron, had told him plainly that he could have got it for him but for "Buryshaft, who wanted it for one of his own Methodist fellows." He had to wait, therefore, and on the last occasion the same unhappy influence was again brought to bear, but without success this time. He could, therefore, be hardly expected to join with enthusiasm in praises of such a person.

Mr. Churchill was yet more unfortunate in his allusion to the pamphlet. Why, everyone knew, or *did* know five and thirty years ago, that "Livings and Laymen" had been *suppressed*, as it were; that it contained bitter strictures on the way patrons treated their clerical clients; and that when Lord Mountsheltie "took him up" and began to use his interest for him, the reverend gentleman took pains to secure the bulk of the impression (the trouble being no more than a journey to the publishers'), and also to get back from his friends any stray copies that were not in the shape of *allumettes*, &c.

It took Mr. Churchill some time to gather force for a new effort, for he had counted much on the success of his compliment; and the last shape to which he had determined to put it seemed almost elegant. He tried again with Major Grainger.

"He's going to India," said the bishop.

"I heard that yesterday. He has great gifts," said Mr. Churchill, with an enthusiastic pathos.

"No doubt, no doubt," said the bishop blandly. "He will have a fine field for them out there. But he will have to—to soothe 'em. Roughness or *brusquerie* will only alienate. He has of course all my wishes and prayers. Sir John, help yourself. What did you do with that tenant of yours?"

After dinner, when they had risen and were taking coffee, Mr. Chewton at once took possession of Mr. Churchill, and entirely fended him off from the bishop, who was bestowed with Sir John in easy chairs, and, lying back luxuriously with their knees crossed, and coffee-cups high in the air, murmured softly and confidentially together.

The clergyman looked over wistfully at them, and tried at times to edge away from the chaplain, who, however, laid his finger on his chest, and said plainly,

"No! no! the bishop has a great deal to say to his Sir John." Presently it was time to go. "Permit me, my lord," said he, "to express my humble satisfaction in having spent one of the most delightful——"

"Oh! dear, no! no!" said the bishop, yawning and rubbing his face over as he yawned. "Chewton, see about Sir John's cab. Hope Mr.—er—Mr. Churchill, you will get home safe. Good-night; good-night, Sir."

Mr. Churchill lingered; this parting seemed such sweet sorrow. He almost wished that the custom of Catholic countries obtained here, of bending and kissing the episcopal ring, or sinking down and asking the parting benediction. But there was no ring to salute, and the prelate, a little "full" and sleepy now, would have

been roused into wakefulness by so unusual a compliment. Mr. Churchill had at last to part.

"A most forward, intrusive fellow," said the bishop, dropping languidly on the sofa. Then rousing up as his last guest departed, "Good-night; God bless you."

Mr. Churchill went home only half pleased. But before he reached his house he had many more interviews with the bishop, and had paid that prelate some very elegant though forced compliments, with a success that quite put him into spirits again. He had at least that day "laid a foundation." That happy phrase quite restored him. "Laid a foundation." To be sure. He would come and come again. He heard himself saying to the bishop, the holy man growing old in years, and resting feebly on his arm, "You want, my lord, nothing but soft kind voices about you. Nothing rude, nothing rough, should come near you, my lord."

"Yes, Churchill," the bishop would reply. "I think sometimes people may have quite a different impression of me to what I really am. Chewton, I believe, does want softness and manner. If I could only get rid of him," and the bishop would sigh as he thought of his iron thralldom. Between the next two stations the deliverance of the good prelate had been effected. The chaplain's craft and influence had been met and overthrown by a craft and influence as great.

The reverend gentleman returned in high elation, and finding Polly waiting up with something hot and comfortable, he expanded over this treatment, and gave her a grand and glowing narrative of his day's success; in

which too he so mixed up the interview he had in the railway carriage, his future walks with the bishop on his arm, &c., that he unconsciously represented matters in a far more advanced stage than they really were. Over his tumbler, it is to be suspected more to recreate himself with the prospect than to entertain Polly, he painted in the chaplain in the most odious colours, a prey to all the meanest vices. "But," said he, "I think I have put a spoke in his wheel. I think I have opened his lordship's eyes. He sees the thralldom under which he is groaning. The fellow is tottering at this moment."

"The chaplain, papa?" asked Polly.

"Of course; who else? I told the bishop he was too kind-hearted a man, too gentle himself to have such natures about him, and he agreed with me. Infernal stuck-up puppy!" added Mr. Churchill, getting into a fury as he thought of the "fending off" to which he had been subjected. "I'll settle his hash, if he had all the mole-eyed old bishops in the world at his back."





CHAPTER XXVIII.

"LIVINGS AND LAYMEN."

ON the next morning the clergyman came down quite cheerful and full of eagerness. He was always ready to recommence. He was soon at his desk, busy with his despatches. His first letter was to a London "old bookseller," who lived near the Museum, with an order to procure for him, without delay and at any reasonable cost, a copy of a pamphlet published many yéars ago, by the present Bishop of Dunmore, Doctor Talboys. It was called "Livings and Laymen."

The next step was a letter of acknowledgment to the bishop, "for the delightful evening I was privileged to spend in your lordship's society. As I remarked at dinner, no one knows so gracefully as your lordship how to combine 'Livings and Laymen'—meaning, as I do, *our* cloth by the former. Your lordship will forgive me this allusion, for I fancied I saw last night that your lordship's modesty shrank from the publicity. May I look

forward at some future time, not far off I trust, to a renewal of the pleasure I enjoyed last night in your lordship's society?—some morning, if I might call in, and be privileged to have your society unconstrained by the presence of a third person. Forgive this presumption. But your lordship has a reputation for powers of society, and must, I fear, pay the penalty. Your chaplain, the Reverend Mr. Chewton, I am sure is right in his kind efforts to prevent your being too much wearied by your guests. Let me, in conclusion, my lord," &c. He read this over several times with great satisfaction, and was much pleased at his artful stroke at the Reverend Mr. Chewton. It would set the bishop wondering: "Too much wearied by my guests? Why should I be wearied by men of sense and knowledge of the world? Why should Chewton stand between me and them? What is he at?" This would be the train of thought in the bishop's mind. "What was Chewton at? Had he designs of his own?" perhaps to have the air of influence over the bishop, as though he were old and stupid. Old men resent nothing so much as that, and old bishops above all. From the receipt of that artful insinuation, it was plain to any observer of human nature that Chewton would totter.

Polly entered now, on some little errand. Her father was looking complacently at his letter, and her face seeming almost to reproach him, he thought, "Well, Chewton brought it on himself; it's his doing." And then, with a kind of good-humoured kindness, put it into her hand to read. "That's going to the bishop, Polly."

Polly admired everything he did, and read it with silent appreciation. Only, uneasiness came into her face when she reached the allusion to the chaplain. "What does that mean, papa? What did he do to you?"

Her father twitched it from her impatiently. "What did he do to me? Nothing, of course. Don't you see the point—the irony?"

Polly's face assumed a grieved and puzzled look. "Since you ask me, papa dearest, I do not. He wouldn't be offended, would he?"

"Go away, go away!" said the clergyman in a rage. "You have no sense or tact, no more than one of the common clod-hopper girls out of that field. Go away, and don't worry me."

Polly withdrew in sad distress. She would have given worlds to understand. Some malignant spirit did whisper for a second to him that it might offend; but his pride thrust the fellow away, and turned the feeling into a sort of spite against Polly. "The girl's a mere fool," he said, "and always will be one."

A week went by, and an answer came down from the old "bookseller," near the Museum. The pamphlet was a very old one. It was very scarce, having been, he believed, bought up. But he knew of a copy through his agents, and the price would be thirty shillings—a large sum, but it had to be regularly hunted for.

Polly was treasurer, paymaster of the forces, &c., and her father called her in.

"Thirty shillings for that, Polly," he said. "What would become of you all without me, I'd like to know?"

Polly felt a little faint at this demand. "Thirty shillings, papa?" she faltered.

"Yes, and very cheap the book is, I can tell you. It's worth untold gold to me."

"Thirty shillings for a book, papa!" she said. "Oh, and you know I was keeping it all up for your new frock coat for Sundays. And dearest, you know you want it so badly."

"There's more of her folly. You children can only think of the present—a Sunday coat, indeed. Why, that little book will get me the value of a hundred coats, or a thousand coats."

"A hundred coats, papa?"

"Yes. But I might be preaching to the moon. You'll never get sense or knowledge of the world—never. And d'ye mean to tell me," he said, turning on her with quite a new tone, "that we are in this squalid state, that shillings must be saved up to buy me a coat? I suppose you are not in earnest; or is this the fine management that has been carrying on in my house—eh?"

Polly, in terror, deprecated this rude handling of her little managing arts; her struggle to keep things together. "No, no, dearest," she said, "not that—there is plenty, of course,—for the coat and all—only it seems so much for a book."

"Oh, of course, everything laid out for me is a tax. But it is time I looked into my own affairs. There, just go out and get me a post-office order for thirty shillings, payable to that fellow. There, and be quick."

Polly tripped away with a sad heart; for she dreaded

any investigation into their little money expenses: not for her sake, but for his. For about once a year a stern fit of auditing would come on him, attended with a relapse into dreadful despondency, consequent on a more serious disappointment and rebuff than usual. On these occasions he would call for her account and pass books; and sit with his hand to his head, drawing up long tables of accounts and figures, and examining the trembling Polly as if she were a defaulting clerk; and bursting out now and again with a—"You've ruined me among the whole pack of you! What! Cox's bill never paid? God help us!"

"Indeed, dearest, you know you said he might be put off a little longer, and the money given to Wells."

"Oh, yes. My doing of course. I've ruined you—is that it?"

"No, no! indeed, papa."

Those unhappy nights were like night-mares for Polly, and fearful this might give rise to such another, she got her bonnet and went off to the post. Poor, gentle little accountant!—never was to be known the extent of her struggles "to make both ends meet"—the paring, the squeezing, the stretching; and it must be added, that all that was pared, squeezed, and stretched, belonged nearly wholly to herself.

In due course came down the pamphlet, "LIVINGS AND LAYMEN: a Question for the Age;" and with the motto, "*Quousque tandem.*" It was only twenty pages long, and was in a "scathing" style. It had been written under rather curious circumstances; though the

reverend Mr. Churchill, leaning back in his chair, and turning over the cover tenderly, as though it was a spectral apron, gathered nothing beyond the mere structure of the sentences.

About its date, the well-known Tory nobleman, Lord Bultyre, had married a sister of a no less violent Whig prelate; in fact, the well-known Bishop Stilton, sometimes irreverently called "Cheesy Dick." Mr. Talboys had been in high favour with Dr. Stilton, and until this fatal alliance was considered to be marked out for nothing short of an archdeacon. Within a year no less than three good livings fell vacant, and were found to be all given to Tory nominees of the Tory Lord Bultyre. On the lapse of the first, an excuse was made to the Rev. Mr. Talboys, who was much hurt; on the second, an open breach was with difficulty averted; on the third, the famous "*Livings and Laymen*" came out, anonymously of course; but its authorship was well known. It travelled through the diocese like the fiery cross. It contained two biting etchings of the bishop and the Tory lord. The beginning was often talked of among the country clergy, for its nervous power. "I will take a man, just as the abandoned Sterne took a captive, and I will put him in a palace." Everyone knew that this referred to Thorpe-hill, the episcopal palace. "I will clothe him in purple and fine linen—not in sackcloth, or plain fisherman's dress, as the early apostles appeared," &c. The portrait of Lord Bultyre was no less happy. Everyone knew who Lord Cowweary was, almost a synonym for Bultyre. There was "capital satire" all

through it, especially in the recommendation of an equitable arrangement of patronage for the future, viz., that all Tories should present Tories, and all Whigs should present Tories. But soon after came the embarrassment. The venerable father in God, Bishop Stilton, in course of time died—(the irreverent would say, “So Cheesy Dick is dead!”)—but Lord Bulytre lived on, increasing in fame and influence; and, being full of honours and gout, was ordered off to Vichy, where by an almost Providence, as it seemed to the favoured party, he fell in with Mr. Talboys, then travelling as tutor to a young baronet under age. The nobleman and the clergyman met on a bench under trees, just after taking their waters; and so an intimacy began, which lasted then for the two months during which he kept the young baronet on at Vichy. That Christmas Mr. Talboys was at Bulytre, and in the July following was promoted to the valuable living of Crumpley. Many, on this appointment, recollected the pamphlet “Livings and Laymen,” now many, many years old, for the express purpose of sending it to the patron; but its author had wisely and well secured the whole impression within a year of publication. Some of the old country papers were then consulted for a review, and the portrait of Lord Bulytre was copied, sent in MS., but never read by that nobleman. Was it wonderful that in due course Dr. Talboys, whose principles had shrunk up slowly from full-blown Whig into decent Liberal-Conservative, and from that into pure Toryism, should by-and-by be talked of for a bishopric?—and having been balked, as mentioned, by the Buryshaft influence, at last

received the mitre through the good offices of his patron. Now this is indeed the whole story of "*Living's and Laymen*," which many an old country squire and clergyman could tell us.

But our Rev. Mr. Churchill—*he* knew nothing of it. He was leaning back in his chair reading it—not understanding it, but admiring the "fine English, and caustic satire." He had a pencil, and marked as he went along short terse sentences that could be easily carried in the memory. One of these was stinging: "One of his (Lord Cowweary's) ancestors I suspect to have been among the 'laymen' who were whipped from the trafficking in the Temple a good many hundred years ago." He put two marks against that. After he had read it through, he was thinking of sitting down to write at once to the bishop:—"MY LORD,—Rarely have I enjoyed a greater feast than I have done within the past hour reading '*Living's and Laymen.*'" But another and finer idea occurred to him—he thought of Bumford of the *Cumberley Post*—a little district weekly paper, which got two sides of general news (a London letter, &c.) from town every Saturday.

Bumford was the editor, and allowed influential persons—the doctor, clergyman, &c.—free access to his columns. He would review the pamphlet in the *Post*, and send it to the bishop: "MY LORD,—I have taken a liberty—a great liberty, I fear; but a style really gone out, and that recalls the causticity and vigour of 'Junius,' should not be willingly let die." The review was headed, "A Rare Book," and began colloquially: "Turning over the stores of a little bookseller in the Strand, he came

out of his little dark back shop with a dusty little pamphlet in his hand. Our eyes twinkled." He then gave specimens, especially the portrait of Lord Cowweary, and it concluded with a question: "Who does our readers suppose to be the author of a satire in style and causticity second only to 'Junius?' They will never guess. But have they never noted the same nervous characteristics, tempered by a mild religious fervour, in certain Charges that have of late been issued? Have they never fancied that the gentlest and most amiable of prelates could, if he so pleased, touch his pen with hallowed fire? This famous satire is said to be from the pen of the amiable and gifted T—lb—ys, whose modesty alone makes him wish to have the authorship unknown; and we hope sincerely his lordship will gratify the world by an early reprint of this marvellous piece of composition."

When the proof arrived of the review there was great delight in the house. Polly was allowed to hear it read, and the tears glistened in her eyes as she saw this the first serious effort of her dear father in print. It seemed inspired language. She could have kissed it.

"Dearest!" she said, "it's so like the regular thing—what we read in the regular papers. Oh! it's charming, dear." But this compliment only half pleased her father.

"Every journal is a regular paper, isn't it? Do take care how you speak, and mind your English." He seemed to himself to have a right to speak with authority now.

Polly took the long slip again into her hands. She

was flying away with it up stairs to read it out to Bridget and the children, but was checked with much impatience by her father.

"What folly you go on with! *Don't* take it away. Here, give it back to me; it will get all torn."

"I must read it again, though," said Polly. "And oh, how the bishop will be pleased!"

"Yes, I think so, or he ought to be," said her father, complacently. "The art of it is, it's not laid on too thick. You or anyone else would plaster him, and make him disgusted. Now run away; I must write and enclose it to him."

We may conceive what a letter that was—modest, yet elated, and concluding despondingly; "And yet, alas! my lord, I feel my humble pen has not done half justice enough to the incomparable 'Livings and Laymen.'"





CHAPTER XXIX.

REPULSE.

THE bishop was just before breakfast, and had come in from his morning stroll on the beach, when he found this letter on the table.

"What on earth is this, Chewton?" he said, as the long slip dropped down like a snake.

The first thing that caught his eye were the capitals, "LIVINGS AND LAYMEN," and he almost gave a cry: for over thirty years might surely have consigned that "one mistake of my life"—so he called it—"to oblivion."

"Some ruffian," he gasped, "has raked up that old book! They want to get up something between me and Bultyre, for fear he would do anything for my son. Cumberley Post! Why, that's that infernal persecuting fellow, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes," said the chaplain, calmly; "here's a letter of his with it. He's done it—he's raked it up!"

"O—h!" groaned the bishop. "What an idiot! He has laid himself out to harass and persecute me into my grave. I declare, Chewton, I could just sit down and cry over this;—to think, at my time of life, and my grey hairs!"

His lordship was a little querulous, and really near crying, as he said.

"Here's his letter," said the chaplain. "'Wrote to London,' he says; 'spared neither time nor gold, to hunt it up.'"

"My goodness!" groaned the bishop.

"Character of Lord Cow—Cow—something."

"Cowweary," said the bishop, faintly.

"'Worthy of Junius. I do think one of his ancestors must have been whipped from the Temple some hundreds of years ago.'"

"O—h!" groaned the bishop again. "They'll say that's all profane. They're sure to give it that turn."

"'It is sure,'" continued the chaplain, "'to be reprinted.'"

"Reprinted!" half-shrieked the bishop, starting up, and walking about—"what are we to do, Chewton? Find out something. Stop him, or he'll ruin me."

"Oh, he must be stopped," said the chaplain, coolly. "A most dangerous person. Leave him to me, my lord; I'll know how to deal with him. He shall give us no trouble, depend on it. With persons like this we can always deal plainly."

"To think," said the bishop, "when I come down here for my health—to be kept quiet, as the doctor said;

nothing to be on my mind—to be persecuted in this way!”

“It is dreadful,” said the chaplain. “But leave it all to me; I’ll start after breakfast.”

The Rev. Mr. Churchill was not very long after his breakfast, and was sitting with his slippers on, in very fair good-humour and cheerfulness. Polly was near him, busy with a small frock, on this morning.

“The bishop will be reading that now,” he said, looking at the fire with a half-smile, as though he saw the prelate there, reading among the coals. “Yes, he must have had it long ago.”

“How pleased he will be!” said Polly, looking up. “I would give any money to be looking in at them as they read it.”

“He must say it was flattering. All his lickspittles and parasites, and that scheming chaplain of his—they never thought of that, I’ll swear.”

“No, no, deary; and it was so delicate—getting hold of what had been so long forgotten. Oh, he *couldn’t* be offended.”

There was an awkwardness in this well-intended speech. It jarred on the nice sensibilities of her father.

“You have always such odd things in your head. Who talks of being offended? Holloa!—what on earth!—who’s this now?” and he went over to a sort of “look-out,” made behind the curtains.

The flapping-to of the little wooden gate always gave warning note of a visitor, who, however, invariably fixed a pleasant gaze on the little casement as he walked

up steadily, and "raked" the little chamber thoroughly. No fiction of being "not at home" answered in the village.

Mr. Churchill's sight was not now of the best.

"Seems like a clergyman," he said, doubtfully.

"Not the bishop, dearest?" said Polly, innocently.

Bridget, with some agitation, showed in the new comer. With a start of surprise, Mr. Churchill rushed to meet him, seized both hands, and wrung them warmly.

"My dear Mr. Chewton, this is a surprise! I am so glad! Sit down; let me take your hat."

He never thought of introducing Polly.

The chaplain had a close, guarded, and cold manner, and declined to let his hat be taken.

"No, no," he said, "I am only going to stay a few minutes. I wished to see you."

"And the dear bishop," said the clergyman, enthusiastically, "he is well? Tell me about him. You must sit down."

"I have come, at his request, to speak to you very seriously. It seems you have sent him this thing," he added, pulling out the slip of proof. "It is a most unfortunate thing altogether. I can't tell you how annoyed the bishop was."

The clergyman could not answer from surprise and horror. He gasped at his visitor, and could not speak.

"Oh, it is really a persecution," went on the other. "I assure you, you are worrying his life, and now this is raked up. Oh, it must be stopped, that's the long

and short of it ; and I must really request that no more letters be sent of the kind—you—er—understand. The bishop wishes no compliments or things of this kind ; and—his patronage is all forestalled.”

Oh, for Polly’s poor wistful face as she listened to this dreadful and unexpected language !—so unjust, so malignant ! Now she believed thoroughly every word that was thrown out against this plotting and malignant chaplain.

“Oh, Sir,” she struck in eagerly with her gentle voice, “there must be a mistake. Papa has done nothing to Dr. Talboys. I know he meant all in the kindest intention ; and indeed if you only *read* it—just read it, Sir.”

“Oh, I have enough to read, Ma’am,” said the chaplain, coldly, “and I have no doubt about his intention. But the thing must end, and mustn’t go on—that’s all I have to say.”

A flush came to Polly’s face. Her father had now recovered himself. He was red and pale by turns. How Polly’s heart bled for his humiliation ! The proof so contemptuously returned had fluttered down on the ground between them.

“Then I tell you what, Sir,” he said. “I don’t follow this at all ; and I don’t believe a word of it, Sir. I know how his lordship feels, and who is between me and him ; and whose object it is to be between me and him. I understand, Sir,” continued the clergyman, standing up, and speaking with trembling voice—“I know the arts that have been used to keep me from the bishop.”

The other stood up with unfeigned astonishment in his face.

"What on earth do you mean, Sir?"

"No matter," said the other: "but they shall not succeed, I can tell you. His eyes are a little opened to the thralldom under which he groans—and they shall be farther opened if it rests with me."

Mr. Chewton turned pale. Every chaplain who is liked by his bishop has an instinct that something of the sort is being said about him. He *had* influence.

"I despise such insinuations," he said. "I treat them with contempt. The bishop has too much confidence in me to be affected by them. You are welcome to do your best. I have merely come here on the mission with which he charged me, not to get into any personal discussion with you; and I tell you plainly that for the future the bishop must be protected from intrusion and persecution either by visits or begging letters."

A hot flush came to Polly's cheeks.

"Oh, Sir," she said with indignation, "how can you speak so to my father? He does not send such letters. It was Major Grainger that introduced him, as one gentleman would another; and we are sure the bishop never authorised such language to be used to *him*."

"He did not," said Mr. Churchill, "and I will *see* that——"

"My conduct," said the chaplain, still sore on the charge that had been made, "is above all suspicion. I invite inquiry—I court it. Such a charge has never

been made before. But I defy my slanderers. I do not choose to wait now. Good-morning, Miss—er—Churchill."

When he was gone Polly flew to her father and put her arms round him.

"Don't mind him, papa dearest."

The clergyman set himself free impatiently, though he was not thinking of her.

"Yes, I'll expose him. Now I have no restraint. A mean artful intriguer! If I live for anything, it will be for that. I shall go straight to the bishop, and have a private interview. The man shall be exposed in his true colours. It's only common duty and common charity. Why," he added, with infinite disgust, and taking up the critique of "Livings and Laymen," "why, it's a falsehood on the face of it! Why, I should like to know, should he be offended at this? It would please the Archbishop of Canterbury himself. The fellow has suppressed it. Offended, indeed! You said that," he added, turning on her, darkly. "What do you go on starting such things for?—such follies? No wonder the fellow picked it up. No, just go away now. I'm nicely persecuted among you all. Go now, quick; I have plenty to do and think of."

Polly stole away.

He had plenty to do and think of. First, a letter to the bishop, calm and remonstrative, but wholly exculpating him: "MY LORD,—It is my duty to lay before you a plain narrative of facts, which I trust will reach you directly, and not filtered through any medium." A

trusty hand—a little ingenuity—could easily arrange that this “personal explanation” should travel direct, and escape the lynx eye of that unprincipled man. He could go over himself, after a decent interval, and watch his opportunity. The bishop walked a good deal on the sands, recruiting his health by the invigorating sea breezes. The chaplain could not be “always glued to his side.” A fine fresh day. “My Lord,” he said, “the surprise—the joy, I may say, of this meeting overturns me. Could I have the privilege of a few moments uninterrupted conversation with your lordship?”

The mild eyes of the prelate beamed on him gratefully, as he stopped in his walk.

“Certainly, Mr. Churchill,” he said, “why not? Let us walk, though; I am not quite so strong as I was, so give me your arm. What is this great business, now? Out with it, and if we can manage it——”

“This is only what I might have expected from your lordship’s known benevolence and generous character. It was about that little humble critique which I ventured to pen on one of the most remarkable productions of the century, second only to ‘Junius’ in force and causticity—‘Livings and Laymen.’”

“Oh, that,” would say the bishop, good-humouredly, “that little early thing! Why, I thought all the world had forgotten it. But when am I to see this critique?—a hostile one, of course, eh?”

He had sly humour, this bishop.

“I thought so,” said Mr. Churchill, calmly; “I knew your lordship had never seen it, nor my letter. Both

were, no doubt, intercepted ; by whom, it is not for me to say."

"Intercepted?" said the bishop, colouring. "Who would dare?—no—no; I am not come to *that* yet. What d'ye mean, Churchill? Speak out, man."

"Then may I speak freely, my lord, openly and candidly, and all in your lordship's interest, as I am a living man?"

Then the revelation would follow, received by the bishop in the kindest manner—oh, so paternal and gentle!—grieved more than angry at being so imposed on. The thing is, of course, too serious to be settled at once. They must plan together.

Alas! that all this delightful interview should have taken place in the little mean study of Cumberley Vicarage! But it answered very well, and when Polly came down with commiserating face, and entered shyly, she found her father in really cheerful spirits.





CHAPTER XXX.

THE RETURN.

UMBERLEY village church rose, short, low, and stout, on a bank beside the road, a little outside the town, but nearer than the clergyman's house. It was of the "good old pattern," the "good old stock"—so do they speak of admired old gentlemen—and had a short, sturdy tower like a box; and, like the old gentlemen, wore a thick, warm, oddly-cut surtout of ivy. Among this ivy the old window shone and glistened like enamel; and round in the long grass the gravestones were stuck in at all sorts of angles, and in the wildest mortuary disorder. The sound of the old bell, still strong and mellow, but a little hoarse and mellow, came through the sloping stone shelves in the tower, and called the congregation to prayer, and the Reverend Mr. Churchill to his desk, every Sunday. He had a thorough contempt for it, calling it an "old rat hole," not fit for a Christian clergyman to put on his gown in; and he longed to

see it pulled down and "a decent," staring, pearl-white, theatrical, gothic building put up in its place, by the liberality of the congregation.

Every Sunday he went through his duty to the rather scanty worshippers, who seemed to look out of deep oaken boxes, as though they were watching him from rifle pits. The congregation had been very respectable until the "irregular" Mr. Bush arrived, and "tampered" with Mr. Churchill's following, "pulling up wheat and tares," &c. Beyond this protest, the reverend incumbent made no exertion, coming down every Sunday morning, reading his service and giving them a short, dry, chippy sermon, in which conventional exhortations to piety were given with a manner almost contemptuous. A far more persuasive sermon was the sight of Polly herself, seated in the deep cavernous pew at the head of her little family, with her face and lustrous eyes turned tenderly to her father, drinking in that apostle's holy words and doctrine, as though he were some being inspired of God, which indeed he was not; for he did not even assume the conventional air of earnestness and piety. That soft face, with all its tender colouring, had now, perhaps, grown a little finer and sharper, had a wistful and restless air; for after all, though she could sacrifice her own heart and feelings again and again for that one dear object, it was not to be done without wear and tear and sore struggle.

Word had now come that the Squire might be expected home at any moment; and Polly's letter both from him and from her friend had brought joyful news of the

complete restoration of the young man. The greedy enemy had done mischief, had devoured something, but had been forced to relax his hold, and driven off. Still he remained at a little distance, watching with eager eyes; and on the first opening—a draught, coming from a ball, or wet stocking—he was ready to spring. Everybody was elaborately thankful, and congratulated each other, as it were: “Such a blessing!” “Such a Providence!”—though, indeed, they were but thinking of him as a sort of lay-figure standing for the glorious image, *Heir Apparent*; and therefore most dear and precious to the public. This was the conventional idea; but down at *Cumberley* everyone was indeed glad to hear it, and much interested in the *Squire*, whose goodness and heartiness made him popular with everyone. They were all coming back; the house was being “done up,” and the housekeeper, consulted obsequiously on the matter, announced publicly that Monday was the day of the return. Everyone was looking forward to grand festivals; there were people coming back with the *Squire* on a visit, and *Cumberley* would have a gala time of it. The young man was quite strong again. He was indeed uninteresting enough, having no “conversation,” and but little gifts: still to have an heir saved was much.

From the housekeeper too had also been learned a bit of information which did not give so much satisfaction, that little *Madame French*, the charming and coquettish *Miss Fanny*, was not coming back with them, having been put to a school in France to acquire the graces of that elegant nation. This was a trouble for *Polly*, who was

thinking of her brother Tommy, who she fancied had lost much of that roughness and uncouthness which had so stood in his light before. And in truth he was improved, mainly through her gentle training and all but whispered correction, though his father had long since "given him up" as hopeless, and bade him never come into his sight at all. Given him up! This was one of the fictions in which the reverend gentleman lived, for he had never taken him in hand or devoted the smallest share of pains or trouble to him. "Send him to school?" he would say. "It is easy to talk. Would you say Eton or Harrow? How am I to do these things? That's all very fine, giving advice!"

It was on the Sunday morning before the Squire's return, long after the "Livings and Laymen" business, that when Mr. Churchill stepped up in his little pulpit and looked round as he gave his dry "hem," he was confounded to see the old Godfrey pew, the front one on the left, quite full. There was the Squire—he saw this over the leaves of his sermon—his son, a delicate looking young man, the Squire's wife and daughter, a thin lady, and another gentleman new to Mr. Churchill, with a bright, keen, challenging eye, which seemed to say profanely to the clergyman, "Now, is there any meaning in what you are saying?" He had a pale and high nose, small black whiskers, and sat well back with his arms folded, as though, it seemed to the clergyman, he were on the Ministerial benches. All these symptoms completely upset the clergyman. There was a party, it was plain, at the Hall. The wife and daughter and delicate son had

returned suddenly from abroad, and here was a guest of distinction staying with them who had his eye on him. Had the clergyman been in ordinary communication with his parishioners their gossip would have reached him as a matter of course, and he might have learned all that was going to take place at the Godfreys'. The worst was, he had come with a "poor rubbishy" sermon, meagre, full of platitudes, the first he had snatched out of a drawer, where he kept a bundle in stock. Still he tried to make up by the delivery, and stole glances at the new gentleman with the folded arms, but who seemed to him incredulous, and challenging every statement as though it was that of a member on the opposite benches. It was the most unfortunate, stupid thing that could be conceived—such a stupid composition, suited for a religious *canaille*, brotherly love, avoiding tittle tattle, scandal, &c.—nothing grand, no ingenious refinements; and he had actually a sermon suited for London men, with a parliamentary tone, in which there was a "fine passage," likening the two powers of sin and grace to the Opposition and Ministry, very delicately done, and carried out minutely even to the "independent members" who joined one side and then the other, with an allusion to who was the "leader of the Opposition." It was cruel, and he felt he made a very bad exhibition, though he knew as he came down whose fault it was, and who he would call to an early account. "She might have put me up to that. Only thinks of herself." When he came out at the back of the church he saw a group standing round Polly, who was all glowing with colour and confusion at such notice.

The Godfrey ladies had known her and had been her friend for years before. Miss Godfrey had been a sort of companion. Then came the illness of the young man, a threatening of consumption, which in the case of an heir is enough to break up any establishment. They went abroad to Malaga and Madeira, and remained away some years, playing hide-and-seek with winters and east winds. The Squire could not remain behind. He had to give up his "huntin'" and his estate and his country life, which was indeed a cruel sacrifice. But here they were all met again, the young man of age, and tolerably restored.

Olivia Godfrey was a generous, eager young lady, and delighted to see her old acquaintance. Polly, indeed, touched the sympathies of everyone who even saw her.

"You must come up and see us, and stay with us a few days. You must promise. We are having a few friends to celebrate Arthur's coming of age."

The Squire came in, heartily :

"To be sure she will ! Why not ? We'll take her out of that little box, and give her a run in the gardens, and a dance at night, too."

Polly hung down her head. She was confused at this kindness.

"Oh," said she, earnestly, "you are so good and kind ! But I am afraid papa, and——"

And she looked a little helplessly at the two children who, awe-struck, were clinging to her dress behind.

"Oh, the nursery !" said Mr. Godfrey. "Very good

indeed ! They can get on very well for a day or so. Ah, here's his reverence."

His reverence was coming towards them, bowing and smiling. This was indeed a gala morning. Such a thing did not happen for years.

The Squire, who, it has been mentioned, never relished the parson or his company, and scarcely took any notice of him, gave him a gruff "Good-morning" and "How d'ye do, Churchill?"

Ladies—women—have more reverence for the cloth, whatever its quality, and greeted him with smiles and welcome. He had edged himself in front of Polly.

"I am so glad to see all the party assembled again at our little church. It was a moment of unmixed happiness for me when I looked down and saw the old pew full——"

The parliamentary gentleman was still in front, looking at him with the bright challenging air.

"Oh, Mr. Churchill!" said Mrs. Godfrey, with the start that often precedes ladies' introductions, "you must let me : Mr. Henry Parker, Mr. Churchill!"

Was that all?—a mere Henry Parker to cause him any discomfort ! He was not a little disgusted, for he had counted on a baronet in office, at least.

"And," said Mrs. Godfrey, looking round, "let me also : Mrs. Surtees, Mr. Churchill, our clergyman."

The lady, with her eyes fixed on the clergyman's face, bowed with smiling reverence. The party then moved away out of the churchyard, the two girls by themselves.

"I am so glad to see you again," said Miss Godfrey,

warmly. "Do you remember what friends we used to be? We must be so again; and you must promise to come—we have fixed Tuesday—and no excuse. We are going to have a little amusement for dear Arthur, now that he has been made a man, as papa says. We have a few people staying, and you will be amused; to say nothing of some dinnering and dancing, as papa says. Now, you are to come."

Polly looked irresolute: but pleasure was in her eyes. She could enjoy herself, with all her sense of duty.

"Oh, I should so like it! But you don't know, I have so much to do——"

"Those children? What nonsense! They can spare you a few days. Surely that woman you used to have——"

"Well, yes," said Polly, that difficulty seeming to be removed, but still irresolute, "perhaps so; but dear papa, he can do nothing without me. I could not leave him an hour."

"Well, he won't mind; so mind it's settled now, and finally arranged, no going back. Oh, I have so much to ask you and talk over!—all about the marriage and your major."

Polly coloured.

"Oh, yes," she said, "that is to be."

"But then," the other interrupted, "it's so mysterious; for there was another, was'n't there—at least so they told me—who was not a major?"

"Oh," said Polly, looking round hurriedly, "it is a long story, and some day I will tell it all to you."

Then Miss Godfrey saw in the nervous voice and forced smile the whole history of that little trouble. She pressed her friend's hand, and said kindly :

"I didn't mean ; indeed I did not ; and I see you are the same as you always were."

The rest of the party had come up with them. They were, indeed, walking towards the Godfrey gate. They must come in and have some lunch. As they went up the avenue, the clergyman talking to the two ladies, Mrs. Godfrey and Mrs. Surtees,—he had seen through that poor pretender, Mr. Parker, from the first, and took not the least notice of him,—Miss Godfrey said joyfully to them,

"She has promised to come, papa. She has got over her scruples. She will come on Tuesday."

"Quite right," said the Squire. "Good girl."

Mr. Churchill stopped in some fluent description as he heard this. He was not at all pleased. There was no reference to him. It seemed like asking a servant out of his house, this asking Polly. He looked from one to the other. Squire Godfrey saw his mortification and enjoyed it.

"We'll take care of her, never fear, and send her back t'ye safe. You can take care of the children a bit.

Mrs. Surtees, who had still her eyes fixed on the clergyman, said softly,

"Perhaps Mr. Churchill cannot well spare his daughter." Everyone seemed distressed at the difficulty, but no one would propose the solution, which was indeed obvious.

It was a long time since the clergyman had been inside that house. The Squire had always treated him with studied neglect.

"That fellow has not two ounces of blood in him," he would say. "I have no notion of putting my good wine into such a vessel as that." And thus, though civil, he never paid him any civility.

They had lunch in the parlour ; it was a fine old place, with oak, pictures, old timber, &c. It was pleasant to the clergyman's eye, and there was an air of state very refreshing after the cribbing and cabining of his own little residence. He found himself thawing insensibly, and his limited powers of speech expanding into fluency.

The two ladies listened to him with reverence, particularly Mrs. Surtees. As for the gentleman with a parliamentary manner, who used to take an amused look over at him, he could hardly conceal his contempt for him. He even "put him down," setting him right on some matter.

"I thought it was quite the other way," said Mr. Henry Parker, modestly ; "but you may know better."

"I happen to be perfectly well informed on that subject," said the clergyman with a pitying smile.

"I say, Parker," struck in the Squire cheerfully, "bishop's to be here on Thursday, and stay a few days, too. Not our fellow, you know—but t'other."

Mr. Churchill, bending over and waving a bit of bread, was descanting on some matter to the two ladies when he caught this talismanic word. He was saying, "I at once

called upon him, and was shown up stairs, &c.—What bishop? Not Brindley?”

“God bless you, no; wouldn’t let that fellow inside my door. No, a man worth two of him—Talboys.”

“Talboys!” said Mr. Churchill, almost overwhelmed.

Mr. Parker, having now got rid of his challenging look, was listening with infinite interest to Polly’s most natural and artless talk about all that interested her, the children, the parish, &c. She saw they wished to hear this, and gratified them. She even spoke of Major Grainger, quite calmly and firmly; but her eye wandered over restlessly to her father, and a sort of twitch came to her cheek as she heard the allusion to the bishop. She knew what was passing in his mind. But there was yet another trial in store for him.

“I say, Parker, did ye get your dispatch-box down by post, as usual, this morning?”

“Oh, yes,” said the gentleman, “but haven’t opened it yet. Every packhorse even is entitled to his Sunday’s rest. The chief’s on the ground, you know.”

Mr. Churchill was up in a room at the Palace. “He asked me to sit down in the politest and kindest way—” when he caught these words—“Dispatch-box,” “chief,” his eye wandered away from the two ladies, and he left himself standing there in the drawing-room of the Palace. He searched the white face of Mr. Parker with an inquiry, as who should say, “Something has been suppressed from me—eh?”

They rose from lunch. Polly was taken by her friend

out into the garden. There the whole history of the major and the engineer was told—told without affectation, listened to with sympathy. Such a story must always find eager listeners. Polly made no boast of sacrifice. Another thing, indeed, was on her mind, and an opening soon came.

“We have been away so long,” said Miss Godfrey, “I want to know you better now, and make up for lost time. Recollect, now, I cannot see too much of you: and indeed it is a charity to me in this wilderness. Cannot you come to-morrow instead of on Tuesday? Your father will not mind.”

Polly looked at her with clear, open eye; then with a sort of blunt simplicity, said:

“Now, would you tell me this?—why Mr. Godfrey has not asked him?”

The other was embarrassed, and looked away.

“Well, of course he should be, dear Polly. But the truth is—and you won’t be angry with me—I don’t think he likes him much.”

“And why?” asked Polly, with deep earnestness, and stopping short in her walk. “He don’t know him well—his goodness, his cleverness, and powers; no one has an idea of that, for he is lost here and has no opportunity, while others inferior are pushed forward. Oh, I am so distressed for him, and he feels it so. And do you think, now, would there be any difficulty in letting him come instead of me? It would be such an object to him to meet this bishop. He is sure to make an impression on him; and you are so kind, I know you will forgive my

speaking in this odd way, and making so extraordinary a request."

The other looked at her almost with wonder, and with love.

"Leave it all to me," she said. "Then we'll manage it."

They returned to the drawing-room. Mr. Churchill was rueful and silent at the result of the morning. He had had no opportunity of repairing his mistake in reference to Mr. Parker, the gentleman having left the room, though he might have found willing and appreciative listeners in the two ladies. Father and daughter both went away, without any invitation being given to the former.

Almost in the avenue he began :

"Such work it is! Always putting yourself forward—never thinking of anyone but yourself. Of course it is very fine for you to go gabble, gabble with that girl, and amuse yourself about the garden; while the poor working packhorse" (he took this phrase from Mr. Parker) "has to slave at home, and find money for your finery. I declare I have no notion of letting you go. The thing of all others that would have suited me, meeting the bishop! Oh, it's intolerable!"

"But, dearest," said Polly, "I think—I am sure it is in train to be managed. I spoke to——"

"You did? 'Pon my word, this is nice! You are beginning to patronise your father. Pleasant thing, at my age, to have invitations begged for me by my own daughter. And so you mean to say you asked them?"

"No, no, dear ; that is, I am sure she herself——"

"Oh, I dare say it was too much trouble. Of course everyone thinks of themselves. You couldn't throw in a hint, even—no. Who's that fellow, Parker? Did you find out that much?"

Polly answered in a low, timorous voice :

"He's Under Secretary for the Colonies, papa—the Right Hon. Henry Parker—and in parliament."

"Oh, better and better ; nothing could be nicer. 'Pon my word, we have made a pleasant thing of it. And now, would you be good enough—if not too much trouble—to tell me what you did say to that girl?"

With much confusion, Polly had to tell what she had proposed to Miss Godfrey. He then suddenly changed the topic.

"And that woman who was with them?"

"Yes, papa," said Polly eagerly, giving him all the information that would please him. "They told me that was a Mrs. Surtees, a rich widow, with a jointure, who has come to stop with them. And now, dearest, don't think of that, for I am sure and have a presentiment we shall both be there ; and the bishop does not come until Thursday."

They were now at their green gate. Mr. Churchill entered first, as he always did, and in rather better humour ; he merely grumbled a little, then went into his study and held important conversations with the Right Hon. Henry Parker and Mrs. Surtees. He had noticed her listening to that poor sermon ; if she had

only heard some of his more ambitious and showy efforts! It was most unlucky: and the blunder, too, about Parker. But he was a man of the world. "My dear Sir, I suppose you see more human nature in a day than I do in a month." "Churchill, send me the claret." "Yes, Squire. As I was saying, I noticed you in my church the first thing, and I thought 'That must be a House of Commons man'—something in the look, the reflective attitude, the way you seemed to grapple with every statement I made, as much as to say, Have you chapter and verse for that? I assure you I felt quite timorous. By the way, that was one of my common run of sermons, kept for the rustics. I shall have something better on Sunday next." He afterwards received many airy compliments from Mrs. Surtees, as he held his coffee-cup on his knee, having come up from dinner.

Altogether that Sunday was a remarkable day, and Polly was delighted to see that his hopes were rising as the day wore on.

Oh, what joy for her as she saw a servant open the little green gate and hand in a note, in which the Squire hoped that Mr. Churchill would come to them on Wednesday night and stop a few days, to meet Dr. Talboys! But they hoped to see his daughter to-morrow, Monday, instead of on Tuesday.

"I told you," he said, placidly; "you see there's no use in that pushing, and putting in, and begging. The thing always comes of itself, if we only take it quietly. Of course everyone thinks themselves wiser than I am.

However, let them go on in their own course, and see how it will end."

Polly welcomed much more of this objurgation with pleasure, she was so relieved the letter had come; and she slept pleasantly that night.





CHAPTER XXXI.

CINDERELLA AT THE PALACE.

ON the next day Polly went over, not without reluctance—for would not the care of the children—the police, as it were, of the house, be all cast upon others? But she had the idea that greater advantages would on the whole result from her going than from her staying. Her father was aggrieved on taking leave of her.

“Now, I hope,” he said, “you will not be so wholly engrossed by your amusements as to quite lose your wits. Just keep your eyes open, and try and make friends for those who have to earn the daily bread for you by the sweat of their brow. Now—now—there—that will do.”

This was a protest against Polly’s fervent embraces and even tears.

It was all new to her, and very delightful—above that temporary freedom from her daily round of drudgery—and the change to ease and quiet, and the kindest and most encouraging faces, and the charming gar-

dens, and the luxurious house. It was paradise. Again she seemed like Cinderella, and felt a sort of awe; only there were no cruel sisters exactly. How good and gracious the world seems under such conditions!—"everybody so kind"—after all too often based on a mere selfish sympathy in a face or figure that pleases. She was almost bewildered.

At dinner was a large party—one or two more young ladies and a gentleman or two. Polly was neat and elegant in her dress always. She had kept clear of the fatal dowdiness often taken for innocent simplicity. There was a new staff of servants, and the plate out. All this was in honour of the son Arthur, who had been so restored—a silent, rather long, and unhealthy youth—who had been spoiled by what the Squire called "coddling and women." "All I mean, if I had my way, I'd have him set on the back of a hunter, and galloped him out of it in a season." Of age as he was, his mother kept her eye upon him and watched while he ate as though he were a schoolboy. When all the lamps were lit, and playing on the flowers down the table—what with the choice wines and the choice meats, and the number of servants, it seemed again to Polly as if she was indeed Cinderella and this was the Prince's palace. Only, then her heart smote her as she thought of one who was not privileged to be there, and was sitting alone in their little cottage. And she grew melancholy for a few moments. The Right Honourable Henry Parker was beside her, a very rising young statesman, with much good sense and some heart—having not yet seen that official forms and

endless reels of red tape were real statesmanship. This stage, of course, might come on later. From the day before, he had been greatly attracted by what he called "the pictures" of Polly and her father, and he read off the characters of both perfectly. Indeed Polly's face told the whole. The day before he had said at dinner to the ladies, "I can tell you the whole story of that young girl and her father:" and so he did, to the amazement of the Squire, who set it down to magic or collusion. Miss Godfrey spoke enthusiastically of her. "I am quite sorry to have lost so much of her. But we must make up for it all and see a great deal of her now, and comfort her; for she has had a deal of weary trouble in her life." Then she told the story of her mother and the tenderness of her daughter for that lost parent, and of the latter for him. Mrs. Surtees alone listened without joining in the praise, and owned that, after all, "she never liked those quiet suffering things."

"I was telling your history yesterday evening," said the Secretary to her. "I guessed it all. I even made out the shape of your house, though I have never seen it. They were talking a good deal of you; you seem a great favourite."

Polly received this news with modest joy.

"Indeed she has the best of hearts and is too kind to me. Formerly we were such friends, then there was some little coldness between my father and the Squire; and then they went away, and we wrote regularly for a time, but I must say," said Polly, with a charming confidence of manner that delighted the official, "I had so

many things to think of and to do, that really, Mr. Parker," here Polly put on a wistful and grieved look, "I grew to neglect it; and so it dropped altogether—collapsed as one might say."

There is nothing so pleasant as to have an ingenuous and natural soul pouring out to *you* all its little secrets, thinking, perhaps, that you appreciate.

Mr. Parker asked :

"And this coldness; whose fault was it, Miss Polly? Not your father's?"

"Oh, I am afraid," said she, with an artless artfulness, "that it was that the Squire did not understand him. I believe, indeed, that I am the only one that does. You must know him so long."

Mr. Parker smiled at this *naïveté*.

"I dare say a clergyman unconsciously makes many enemies for himself. Will you think me inquisitive if I ask how did he contrive to offend the bishop? It is for his interest I do."

"Well," said Polly, wisely and confidentially, "it was a complicated matter, and I could not say how it began."

"Perhaps the bishop did not understand him either?"

For a moment a wounded and suspicious look came to her face.

"I *don't* mean that," he said hastily. "I make foolish speeches sometimes—I do, indeed."

"Not in the House?" said Polly, slyly.

The legislator laughed

"But I *do* want to know about the bishop."

"Well, I can tell you," said Polly, resuming her old confidential manner. "I am afraid there were some unkind people who turned the bishop against him. Papa thinks a chaplain; but he may be mistaken. But it has often struck me as being the only way it could be accounted for. There could be no reason why he should, as well as any other person; and he having set his heart on it so."

"It might be so," said the young Secretary, gravely. "But is he in his diocese?"

"Well, no—o," she said, doubtfully—the admission was wrung from her.

"Ah, that's rather against it, you see. We can't expect them to do much for us, with all their own hungry cormorants to be satisfied. In self-defence they must refuse."

"No?" said Polly, looking at him with grief. "You think so?"

"Clearly. Fancy a man applying to me to pass over the men in my own office! I couldn't bring myself to do it. But bishops may be different."

"I never thought of all that," continued Polly. "I am afraid he must have thought strangely of us. Still, no. Why should he have answered us so bluntly?"

"Us!" repeated the Secretary. "Oh, I see. Now let us see. Could we lay our heads together and knock out some plan? I ought to be good for something—for that much."

"Oh, yes," said Polly, her face beginning to glow again with excitement; "indeed, yes."

"The bishop is to be here himself, as you know. Suppose you attack him boldly?"

Polly shook her head. "He would not like that. I doubt if he would like to meet us. For I am sure he is under the idea he has been worried. No, no; it would not do for *me*."

"Then who should—if not your father?"

"No; I'll tell you," said Polly, putting her face close to him. "I was thinking last night about the bishop coming, and I would manage just to have it explained that my dear father meant him no disrespect; in fact, his offence was writing a very clever review of an old work of the bishop's; and if I were to get Miss Godfrey or Mrs. Godfrey just to tell him after tea some night——"

"The worst choice in the world," said the Secretary, coolly. "That *would* settle it. He wouldn't mind them."

"Then what are we to do?" said Polly, despairingly.

"Just think," said the other, with a smile; "turn it over. Is there anyone else? Look up and down the table."

Polly did as she was desired—travelled up and down, and then—at last—looked at him.

"Oh," she said, suddenly, "but I could not ask you."

"Why not?" he said. "'The honourable member will state his reasons.'"

"Oh, it will be too kind—too much of you."

"I know the bishop, or rather he knows me. A good many sons—you understand—a great strain on the episcopal purse. I am told he is very anxious to know me

better. There can be no harm trying. Leave it to me, and I'll explain that no harm was meant. I wish people would offend me by writing flattering notices of my books. I wrote a pamphlet when I left college, which they literally sliced up. No—we'll lay that foundation; clear away misconceptions; and then, if we made a good impression, there's no knowing what might come next."

Oh, the joy, the delight and happiness as she listened to this kind offer!

"And he will do what I want," said the Secretary. "I have reason to suspect he will. Now tell me all about yourself. I am a miserable jaded town man, and it will be refreshing to hear about the country life. What do you do at home now, and how do you keep those little troublesomes in order?"

Here was an invitation and a pleasant subject. Polly talked on on a pleasant topic with delight and that earnestness which made her so charming to all who listened. She told him their whole life, giving him the details of their little Meissonnier interior. The Secretary was greatly entertained; he had a pure interest in her. Not that we may credit him with any feeling verging on *tendresse*, for at home he had Mrs. Parker and his two children, for whom he worked hard.

They were now in the drawing-room. The gentlemen were below. Polly often dreamed of these nights—the soft lights, the luxurious happy air, the beautiful dresses. So is the gentle rustic mind often affected. Then came up the gentlemen. Then came music. Polly had what

might be called a "nice" gift of music. She could play and sing. She could not go clattering and galloping up and down the piano like a stray horse on a muddy road, splashing mud and stones, or notes, right and left. But at home she often communed with a long-backed, thin and wiry-legged instrument, and found pleasure in its tinkling tones. However, it disturbed dear papa, so she could only indulge in snatches. Here she was pressed to sing, and with very little pressing and some shyness went over to the piano; for she was not one of the perfect creatures, so above all the weakness and forms, as to rise all at once with a blunt compliance, on the very first invitation.

Ciel! what a piano! an organ rather, from the noble Erard. How grand, how majestic, how solemn even! She had awe and respect for the massive thing, as we must all have when we think of the fine work, the long labour, and the heavy cost. It thrilled her as she heard its organ-like tones, and put her fingers on it reverently. The publicity of her situation, the dazzle, the newness of the scene, gave an excitement to her bright eyes, and a fresh colour to her cheeks.

We should have heard her singing, and singing in a modest sweet voice:

JENNY'S SOLDIER.

I.

Sitting at her cottage door,
Jenny waits, and Jenny sings:
Counts the hours o'er and o'er,
Praying that the ship had wings.

Wearily time glides away :
Patient sits she at her door ;
But her soldier, night or day,
Never, never saw she more.

II.

So the tedious years speed by—
Years of waiting, years of pain ;
But her never weary eye
Looks for post and post again.
Day by day, time flits away,
Patient sits she at her door ;
But her soldier, night or day,
Never, never saw she more.

When she had done, there was a murmur of pleasure. They all came about her. The only one in that house who seemed not to “take to her” was Mrs. Surtees, and that lady seemed to be surprised and even amused at her rustic enthusiasm. Polly’s history had been already fully told to that lady, with her love for the young mother who died so early, and her consequent devotion to her father.

At last the delightful night ended, and from that dream Polly passed to others. She never had been so happy as when she went to bed, for there had been some good work done for the dear father that evening : otherwise I dare say she would have felt scruples about her pleasure.





CHAPTER XXXII.

CONFIDENCE.

THE following morning was no less delightful ; it had charms of its own for Polly—the walk in the garden, and the gay company at breakfast. The post had come in, and the large dispatch-box had arrived for the Secretary. Plans were talked of for the day—riding and driving, and what not. It was after breakfast that the Secretary went over to Polly in the deep window, and took a letter out of his pocket.

“This was on my dressing-table this morning,” he said, smiling. “Can you guess whose is the writing ?”

Polly looked, and started a little. Something like uneasiness came into her face.

“Don’t be afraid,” said he, kindly, “all this business is to be a secret between you and me. I haven’t quite finished it ; but I see it is complimentary. I had no idea I was such a great man ; but I tell you plainly, I shall not be offended if he reviews *me*.”

Polly, with a little misgiving, read the letter ; it was very characteristic, and in the old strain :—

“DEAR SIR—When I had the honour of being introduced to you yesterday, I did not for the moment think that I was in the presence of the distinguished statesman who has earned for himself a name that will be known so long as England is at the head of colonial dependencies. I little knew, Sir, I say, that I was in the presence of one who had raised himself to be famous in the councils of our nation. In *our* profession, I grieve to say, there is not the same opening for abilities more splendid. I suppose your valuable time is greatly engrossed ; otherwise, it would be a great honour if you could look in on me at my little cabin here. You have your dispatches to write, and your letters to answer. Perhaps you may be engaged on a work as brilliant as a former one, and will again astonish the world with another ‘Thoughts on Colonial Government.’ It was easy for anyone reading the exhaustive arguments, the lucid style, the clear marshalling of facts of that wonderful pamphlet, to prognosticate the future eminence of its author. I look forward with infinite pleasure to our meeting again on Thursday ; and believe me,” &c.

“How on earth,” said Mr. Parker, “did your father get hold of my pamphlet ? It has been forgotten years ago ; and to tell you the truth, did not make quite the noise your father says. Do you think he has a copy ? If so, I should be very glad to have it : for the booksellers can’t get me one.”

"I don't think he has," said Polly, thinking; "no, I am sure not; and I know nearly all his books. Unless, indeed, in our little lumber closet——"

The Secretary burst out laughing.

"Upon my word, Miss Polly, a nice place to keep me in!"

Polly crimsoned, and hung down her head. She had been thinking how they had found "Talboys on Election" in that place. She firmly believed that her father was as "well up" in the "Thoughts on Colonial Government" as he had been in the "Livings and Laymen." Invaluable "Parliamentary Companion," of which she did not know the value, and quite as useful in its way as the "Clerical Guide!" Here was the entry—PARKER, HENRY FITZWILLIAM ADDINGTON, M.P. for Dubbley, &c., educated at Harrow and Oxford, &c., a Privy Councillor; is author of a pamphlet entitled "Thoughts on Colonial Government." Brooks's, Bayswater Villa, and Parkston, Norfolk.

"And you can't go and see him?" said Polly, anxiously.

"Well, I am afraid not," said the Secretary, looking at his watch. "I have to run up to town. But I shall be down to-morrow. If I have business there, I have business here which I am bound to, you may depend on that."

Accordingly, he went away with a great apparatus of dispatch-boxes. Then followed another charming day of riding, walking and what not.

In those gardens the two girls had their confidences, and showed each other their hearts. Miss Godfrey had

that absorbed interest in Polly's arrangements for her future life which every proper young lady may justifiably have who herself is secure of advancement. Polly told all to her friend.

"It is wonderful," said the latter, "wonderful! and I cannot tell you how I admire you. I couldn't do it, I say frankly."

Polly was distressed at these compliments.

"I have never thought of it," she said; "and it is nothing—oh! nothing in the world!"

"And have you *never* heard from him since—not even a line?"

"Never," said Polly, sadly. "I am afraid he was deeply offended; and, indeed, I treated him cruelly and unkindly, and deserved all that he could do. He was so good and kind, and really loved me so."

"And *you*, Polly—yourself?"

"Well," she answered, with a little hesitation, "I did like him, and was very happy when he was with me. What could I do—what would you do? What would you have me do? My dear father miserable, anxious—slaving for us from morning till night—with all the care and anxiety of bringing us up—and then, when it was in our power to help him—I couldn't bring myself to be so selfish; and though it caused me deep pain"—she stopped. Miss Godfrey saw the tears in her eyes. "Oh! it was very cruel to *him*. But put yourself in my place; what *could* I do? Would it not be the height of selfishness in *me*?—and, as papa said, who knows so much, men do not feel these things scarcely at all. With them

they are mere fancies, he says. And so when I thought that, and that I would be the only one to have to bear a little suffering—it did not make so much matter.”

“You are a surprising and a dear girl,” said her friend, kissing her, “and I must suppose it is all right. Whatever *you* do is right. And this major—do you hear much from him?”

“Regularly. He is very kind and thoughtful. And for one of his nature, which was a little cold and soured, I think I see that he has grown softer and more gentle—and I think he does indeed like me, and he has promised to use all his interest for papa, and to do everything in his power to advance him. And he is a man of honour and a man of his word; and I am sure I shall come at last to love him sincerely. And I shall be very glad, however it turns out, if papa gets his wishes. Should I not, dear? As he says, ‘All that romance does very well for rich young girls who can afford it.’”

They were silent for a few moments.

“And what is this ‘souring’ and roughness? How did he get that?”

“Oh! there is a little history, he says, which he has often hinted at, and said he would one day tell me about; something in his family, which had completely changed his character. He seems to think that since he knew me he is changing back again. If I thought that, or could do any good in my small way, why I suppose I ought to be reconciled to everything, and I am sure I shall be. We have not heard for some time. In his

last he said they might have some fighting before long. But I am sure we shall in a day or two."

So that pleasant morning went by, and the two girls interchanged every thought they had. And that day went by, and that evening, when they had a drive, and Polly the first time for many years drove in her carriage. She enjoyed everything. The little gloom into which their morning's conference had thrown her had passed. Then there was the dinner—not quite so pleasant as that of the day before: for she missed her friend, the kind Secretary, at that time sitting with Mrs. Parker, at his dinner, and giving her a sketch of "a charming young creature I met at that place, quite refreshing for her nature and simplicity." She missed this friend; and even now, though she thought it must be imagination, and uncharitable imagination, fancied she perceived a sort of "dry" and hostile manner in Mrs. Surtees towards her. That lady was almost spiteful, and often showed a kind of quiet and amused surprise at her *naïve* remarks, which she said were "highly pastoral and refreshing." This lady's behaviour very much chilled and abashed our heroine, particularly as, having but a small knowledge of the human heart, she could find no reason for it. In due course Polly went to the piano, and "The Soldier," already a favourite with the Squire, was called for. He always liked anything in the shape of a simple story. And thus another pleasant day closed for Polly.



CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE BISHOP.

AT last, on the next day, arrived his lordship the bishop, who entered the porch with an air of gentle infirmity, and, as Mr. Parker remarked, a kind of "*molliter ossa quiescant*" manner. He had a genteelly venerable air about him, a kind of gentle languor, that seemed to say plaintively, as indeed he had been heard afar off in his own cathedral, "From all inconvenience, worry, fuss, and bore, let me be deliver-ed!" A very amiable dignitary, and "a man of the world," his admirers said.

The Squire received him heartily. "Glad to see you, my lord," he said. "Come in and rest yourself. Have a glass of wine. Very good of you to come to me in this way."

"Not at all, not at all," said the bishop sweetly. "So this is Godfrey Hall! Curious now!—never been here before!"

At dinner time there was a larger party, and yet more

dazzling to our Polly. Mr. Parker had come down, and had greeted Polly as though they had been separated a long time. "Now we have got our bishop safe. You may leave it all to me. Where is his lordship?" he asked of the Squire.

"Tired after his journey. He has been a little overworked with the diocese, and been picking up a little at the seaside. Ah! here he is."

And here he was, all fresh and glowing after a short sleep, and ready for dinner. He glistened all over with new bishop's black, that shone like satin. He glided in calmly, with a sort of peering and expostulating manner and generous welcome to all.

"You know Parker, here?" said the Squire. "To be sure. He has a seat on the box of the State coach. Only for him, we'd have been off the road and in the ditch long ago."

"Only on the back seat, I am sorry to say," said the official smiling. "His lordship may recollect his meeting me at Garretstown—Lord Mountattic's."

"To be sure," said the bishop, bending forward in a perfect arch. "Of course I recollect Mr. Parker. And how do you do, Sir? Ah, Garretstown,—pleasant house! Poor Spooner was there then, the life and soul of us all! You remember his joking young Garret? Dear me!"

"They have gone abroad," Mr. Parker said.

"So they have. It seemed to me even then, do you know," said the bishop, plaintively, "they were—er—putting it on—er—too much, running it a little

fine. I always wondered how Mountattic did it. Of course it was a thing one could hardly give advice on. To be sure I remember Mr. Parker. We had many a talk on the law and constitution. And I think—I think,” the bishop added, playfully threatening, “he promised me to bring in a little Bill about Suffragans—eh?—come, now?”

The bishop, as was his habit, looked round with enquiry at everyone, and noticed Polly, of whom he asked the Squire in a whisper: he thought she might be an honourable, or some one of consideration—“so elegant in person” was she. He gave a sort of start and frowned. “Churchill—Churchill?” he repeated, and looked round uneasily, as though he expected to see some one else of the name in the room. He was going to ask a question of his host in a distrustful “put out” manner, when dinner was announced, and his attention turned away.

They went down in the usual procession. All the way down the bishop’s voice was heard chirruping to his lady. Polly looked at him from afar off with a flutter and reverence. Her lot was cast with her friend, Mr. Parker. He had tried to make what he called “a cutting-out expedition” round the table, and get close to the bishop, or even opposite; but everyone’s place was found for him or her by a little card.

“Never fear,” said he to Polly. “After the ladies are gone, the bishop will want to talk about the Mountattics. That is the kindly moment for confidences.”

That was another glimpse of fairyland for Polly. The

dinner was a "state" one to-day, with the long table, glittering with plate and flowers and bathed in a soft light, the line of genial and animated faces, the gaudy dresses of the ladies, and the family ancestors looking down. At times she grew pensive, and her thoughts wandered away to her father, who was not sharing in these delights, but was solitary over his mutton chop. But her eye grew bright as she thought what business in his interest would be done that night, and how he himself would be there on the next day.

"Watch the bishop," said Mr. Parker, smiling; "how fluent he is. How he talks in a smooth continuous stream right and left and across the table."

The bishop was indeed a picture of animation, bowing and talking, as Mr. Parker described, to the right and to the left, pouring out a stream of soft talk, and every now and again looking half over his shoulder at the presented dish of offered wine. No man "eat a heartier dinner," said his friends, and few so hearty. That enjoyment was now whetted by the sea breezes of Sheltie-super-Mare.

When the ladies had gone up, the bishop looked round the table wistful and smiling.

"Come down here, Mr. Parker, into Mrs. Surtees' place next me. I want to talk to you about Mountattic. Pleasant time, wasn't it?" he added, arranging his cluster of glasses comfortably. "As pleasant, I vow, as ever I spent. Nice house, and really nice people. You recollect that Sir Charles and his stories? But there was folly, great folly, it struck me. Very sad, very sad. I think *she* had a great deal to do with it—a foolish woman,

and too fond of show, and all that. And how sly you were at that time! You didn't tell *me* that office was coming—a-ah—for shame!"

Mr. Parker was very pleasant also on all this rallying.

"And how do you like it now? Hard work, I am sure; dreadful *here?*"—and the bishop touched his forehead. "And yet what is there like work? There is my young fellow, Castlereagh Talboys, now at Eton. I mean him, please God, for that line where he shall have plenty of work. And when you are Foreign Secretary, Mr. Parker, you will find me coming to you to beg, with the other mendicants—ha! ha!"

"My dear lord, I shall be delighted. I am only sorry you should think I am of such poor account that I could be of no use now. I have been sitting all dinner-time next a very charming young lady, whom I am sure I have impressed with a higher idea of my power and influence than that."

"Now, now, my dear Sir. By the way, was that a young girl they brought to me before dinner? Yes, I recollect now. Is she any connexion of a—a—" and the bishop's face twisted itself into a look of discomfort, "of a clairgyman"—so he pronounced it—"who has really been most troublesome and forward—really so much so, that——"

"Well, yes," the young Secretary answered, coolly; "her father is a pushing man—oh, quite sure to get on. Very shrewd and knowing in his way."

"It may be so; but really I must say"—and the bishop coloured at the recollection of "Livings and Lay-

men"—"he really is *too* free—quite too intrusive altogether. Really, Mr. Parker, all I have gone through. You know he doesn't belong to me at all. I believe he is in Brindley's diocese."

"Oh, he is sure to get on," Mr. Parker said again; "he has powerful friends. Very acute and persevering—valuable qualities, those. And a very charming daughter—so natural, so unsophisticated, and yet without a particle of that clumsy rusticity which they confound with nature. I have seen a good deal of her since I have been here. On her young shoulders is the house—half-a-dozen children—marketing—everything. As you can imagine, my lord, they *must* be overrun with *those* blessings."

"If our House," said the bishop, "were to order a return of the children of curates in my diocese, I assure you it would astonish them. So that is the way?"

"I know all about this little *ménage*. In fact, I have had their whole little history told me: all their daily life and cares. And I know that it has so interested me that I am determined to work out something for them."

This he said slowly, and with his eyes fixed on the bishop's round face. The latter grew a little restless—hemmed, sipped his claret, and interchanged his round legs.

"Upon my word, a very charming description—really interests me. Mr. Godfrey, I *beg* your pardon—quite enough, thank you, quite enough. Coffee by all means."

Polly in the great illuminated drawing-room, sitting on the ottoman with her friend, saw the door open softly,

and the gentlemen drop in with a kind of gentle surprise and uncertainty in their faces, as though they might have made a mistake in the room. Why there should be this sort of isolation and coyness in this, seems a little surprising ; unless it be put to the account of a certain proper shame and humiliation at the almost satyr-like function society has been compelling them to perform below. Luxurious and elegant always seems that view which meets their filmy eyes as they enter—floods of soft light, the wax-lights, the calm air of repose and effeminacy, and the soft smile of welcome and even expectancy on the faces of charming women for the soldans who have so graciously come at last.

The bishop entered first—sad, bright, and dewy. There is always uncertainty as to where the first ship will put in. The black episcopal lighter moved heavily across, and dropped gently alongside of Polly on the ottoman, not a little to her flutter and alarm. Living as she had been this last day or two in fairy realms, this seemed the most startling proof of the power of her friendly enchanter.

“We have been talking about you a good deal down stairs in the drawing-room,” he said softly.

“About *me*?” said Polly.

“About you!—oh, dear, yes ; and some very nice things were said—uncommonly nice. Very glad, indeed, to have the pleasure of making your acquaintance, Miss Churchill. Now, do you live far from here?”

“Cumberley, my lord, close by—I and papa, who is vicar.”

“Oh, ha ! yes, to be sure ; quite so. He writes me

letters; very persevering, pushing qualities, sure to get on in this world," said his lordship, adopting Mr. Parker's words. "And in the next, too, let us trust," added he almost mechanically, and looking round at the various faces.

A sudden impulse seized Polly.

"Oh, Sir," she said—"my lord, I mean—I am afraid you were a little displeased at our troubling you so; but I assure you that nothing—nothing in the world was intended. Papa really thought he was doing what would be acceptable, and until Mr. Chewton came in to us on that dreadful morning——"

"Well, I know, I know," the bishop said, a little embarrassed. "Really letters come and are sent away; and, of course, I am obliged to leave a great deal to Chewton. Why, what would life be, my dear child, but a pilgrimage on earth? We are below but for a short time, and—and my health would not stand it. Necessarily all this comes on Chewton's back, who, of course, will make a mistake like another man. But really I must say," said the bishop, interchanging his legs restively, as the disagreeable recollection of "Livings and Laymen" recurred to him, "what on earth prompted him to bring up that old pamphlet after so many years, when no one was thinking of it——"

"But," interrupted Polly, excitedly, "*that* was the reason! He said, why *should* it be forgotten! and I assure you he paid a little fortune in London to get it; for he said it had all the caustic, I think, of Junius. I am not sure," added Polly, blushing and half-smiling,

"that that was the correct word ; but I looked at it myself, and it seemed *very* powerful."

"Put out" as he was, the bishop could not help smiling a little complacently. "But that is such an old story now. Better far let the old stories stay. Yes, it might have been written with some vigour ; for I can put a point on my pen when I choose. And it did make a noise when it came out. But——"

"Oh ! it was so clever and piquant," said Polly, with an enthusiasm for which she must be forgiven ; "and papa said so. And from the day we heard you speak for the soldiers——"

"Oh, come, come. Were you there ? 'Pon my word, Miss Churchill, I see I have a friend and admirer in you. Well, well. The only thing, you see, my dear," continued the bishop, laying one leg in a cosy way across his knee, in a sort of convenient position for cutting off, "your father worries people a little too much. Spends too much on postage, you see. And I am obliged to give my secretary very particular directions about those sort of cases. You see, I am delicate, and the doctors say I am not to be worried."

"Indeed he did not know that," pleaded Polly most earnestly, and all but putting up her hands to pray indulgence ; "indeed, no. He would not have done it for the world. But he has so many to think of and work for at home, and I am afraid Doctor Brindley has taken some dislike to him, and for no reason, that we know. For we have never, *never*, my lord," she added, vehemently, "done anything to him."

"That's very like Brindley—very like—not popular, I believe. Eh? Come now! So I hear. Wants the *savoir faire*, which is everything—everything. Ah! Dear, dear me," he added with his head on one side; and again, abstractedly, selecting a place for cutting off his limb; "curious!"

The Squire came up now.

"You haven't heard Miss Polly here sing. She has a charming song—such a song!—all about a soldier's wife sitting at her door."

The bishop, now very heavy and charged about the head and eyes, lifted the latter with difficulty, and said, dreamily:

"Do go; go over now, that's a good girl. Sing something. I should like to hear it." And Polly rose with alacrity, and floated over to the piano, where she gave her "Soldier," with more feeling and earnestness than she had ever done before; the Squire standing sentry beside her, and keeping time with his head. The bishop's head, afar off, on his ottoman, shone like a morning sun, looked towards her in somnolent admiration. When it was done, he said, in a solemn and melancholy way, that "it was very beautiful—very beautiful!"

Later, Mr. Parker came up to Polly. "For shame!" he said; "I am shocked at you! Artful in the highest degree. For shame, to treat the poor bishop in that way! He now says you are a 'sweet girl.'"

Polly blushed; but it was a blush of delight and pleasure.

"Oh, do you think, Mr. Parker," she said, in her confidential way, and putting her face close to his, that he will do anything?"

"I am sure of it," said he. "Hush! here he comes. We are all going to bed now."

The bishop was coming up, heavy and sleepy.

"Where's Miss—er—ah, yes! there she is. We'll talk over that little matter in the morning. Good-night, my dear child," and he held her hand in his. "God Almighty bless you! you sang your little song about the—er—Soldier, very nicely—very nicely. Nothing could be in better taste and feeling."

So his glistening form faded out backwards towards the door. So another happy day for our Polly ended. So did her friend Miss Godfrey come to her, and put her arms about her and say, "Why, dearest, you have captivated the bishop!"

And so did the Squire call out, "Ah! got on the blind side of the holy man? Go along, Miss!"

All this was so much music in the ears of Polly. As she looked from one to the other, she saw nothing but kindly beaming faces, full of interest and sympathy. It did indeed seem quite secured, and the ground made ready. Long after she looked back to that night as one of the happiest in her life.





CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE DINNER.

AFTER breakfast on next morning the bishop read his newspaper and wrote one letter, then wandered softly towards the billiard room, and found the two young ladies there—Miss Godfrey teaching her friend. The bishop looked on for a time with great interest. Then Miss Godfrey left on some household business. The bishop took up a cue in a sort of *degagé* way.

“A long time since I have had a cue in my hand. The poor dear Bishop of Gravesend was ordered it by the doctors, and I had to play him every morning. You see I can do a stroke yet, and a very fair one.”

In a languid way his lordship kept knocking the balls about ; and after a successful stroke said placidly :

“And so you like my little production, eh? Yes, it made a little noise at the time ; and *that* was the reason I would not wish it to be revived now ; there are parties, you know, who might not like it. People feel these

things at the time, and it would be inopportoon now—oh, highly inopportoon, you see! Hold your cue so, and run your eye along. Dear me—how this all brings back the poor dear bishop! Do you know, it's an unfortunate gift, that of a terse and vigorous style—it's so tempting. Now, you get the balls in a line. The poor old man! that was his favourite stroke! No—no! Don't think, my dear, I am angry with you—I mean, your father. I have heard very good accounts of him indeed. But no worry—no worry; that has been my maxim all through."

"Oh, how kind of you!" said Polly. "How good! Papa himself will thank you when he comes to dinner."

"God bless me!" said the bishop, stopping short as he was preparing a stroke. "*What!* coming here?"

"Ye-es," said Polly, "at four o'clock."

"Oh, ah, to be sure!" the bishop said, a little fretfully.

Polly saw something was wrong again, and was distressed.

"Why, would you not like——" she said, doubtfully. Then it all flashed on her; and with the old confidential, "cosy," almost coaxing way, she came up to him, as though she was his daughter, and said:

"I will speak to papa when he comes, and indeed, my lord, I engage he will give you no trouble or worry."

It was hard to resist her. The bishop was in good humour, made a really surprising stroke, which he had tried to make. The fairy of billiards was on Polly's side, and turned the scale. He was in great spirits in a moment.

"Really that sea air is wonderful," he said. "It is bringing back everything."

About six o'clock the Rev. Mr. Churchill arrived, extra starched, extra shaved, extra brushed from Bridget's hands, a homage he always paid to official rank. But this was a great occasion. When he was shown into the drawing-room he only found Mr. Parker, busy finishing a letter for the post. He looked up as the clergyman entered, who was bowing stiffly to invisible persons of influence.

"Oh, Mr. Churchill!" said the other with alacrity, "the Squire will be down presently. I am Mr. Parker; but we know you very well, and have heard a good deal about——"

The other bowed complacently.

"Oh! we know Mr. Parker down here. Indeed we do. And has his lordship been——"

"No, it was your charming daughter," Mr. Churchill's lips dropped in a dry tight expression, "who has really captivated us all, and I think very favourably impressed our good bishop here. He dines to-day, by the way."

"I know," said the other. "I was to meet him. One of our best dignitaries, so large-minded, so liberal, so broad, so accomplished——"

"By the way—I beg your pardon for interrupting you, but I know a man of the world is always glad to get even a sketch of the *carte du pays*. You will, of course, have a good deal of intercourse with him. He will be glad to meet with you, I know, and I am sure you will thank me for a hint or two."

"Oh! I understand perfectly," said the other, with an

inexpressibly knowing air. "Don't we know even down here in this rustic hole and corner who wrote that treasury of political wisdom, the 'Thoughts'—eh?"

"Oh yes, of course," said Mr. Parker, a little impatiently, "a storehouse of wisdom, and all that. But I wanted to tell you—the bishop has not been well, and I would suggest Mr. Churchill, not pressing him,—you understand?—leaving the thing to work itself, you understand? It's in good hands I assure you. Your daughter, Miss Polly, has been already——"

"You mustn't mind her, Mr. Parker," said the clergyman, earnestly. "She's a mere girl, like other foolish girls. I hope, indeed, she hasn't been meddling, and troubling his lordship, who has so much on his mind."

"Oh, nothing of the kind," said Mr. Parker, a little impatiently. "Why should you suppose that? Here are some of the party."

Mrs. Godfrey and Polly came in fresh as a rose, and flew to embrace her dear papa, who received her rather coldly and with an air of reproof. He was, indeed, absent in mind, looking out for the coming of the bishop. Polly was not at all affected by this reception, for she knew he had much on his mind.

Now the lamps are lighted, and they are all coming down to dinner. Enters now the bishop, glossy and snake-like as the day before, and a little tired, he says, after the drive. At first he does not see the stiff China figure that is trying to bend and bow low before him; for he always finds, as a matter of course, a number of figures bowing and bending before him whom he is never

to know anything more of. The Squire says, "You recollect Mr. Churchill, our vicar?"

"Ah! to be sure, Miss Polly's papa," says his lordship. "How de do, Sir? Have you been quite well?"

"Quite well, my lord, since that pleasant day when I had the honour of having your lordship for host."

"By the way," said the Squire, "Darby here was over in your part of the world, and says he saw poor old Morgan this morning, and that he won't last the night."

"God bless me!" said the bishop. "Do you mean the old man at Blethcote?"

"Yes. Why he's had that living to my knowledge close on fifty years. He *can't* last the night."

"There again," said the bishop, with vexation, "is a signal to plague me. I'll have two dozen letters tomorrow. Most indecent."

Mr. Churchill's ears were being turned from one to the other of the speakers like a dog's; his eyes were looking keenly from one to the other. Mr. Parker could hardly keep from smiling. Darby, the county doctor, then gave details, and became important.

Dinner was now announced, and they went down; the bishop taking the shape of the letter C, drooping over Mrs. Godfrey, and talking gently and fluently all the time of their progress. The Squire cast Mr. Churchill with his admirer, Mrs. Surtees; but that gentleman was looking eagerly over the banisters as they went down, and when they had reached the room pushed past several to try and get close to the one chair that had for him such interest.

"Where's my chaplain and secretary?" said the bishop, in great good humour. "Let her come up near me; I have a good deal to talk to her about. Where's Miss Churchill?"

The clergyman, at the door, craning over the crowd which always cluster in stupid indecision as to where they are to go, and no more considering the lady who was on his arm than the coat-sleeve on which the arm was resting, caught the words as it seemed to him, "Mr. Churchill," and saw the bishop's questioning face. In an instant he was plunging among the guests, and treading on ladies' dresses, with a smile and a "Here, my lord!"—dragging, too, his unhappy companion.

"No, no! Not you, my friend, at all. Go down—no. Where's Miss Polly?"

Polly was led up by her other watchful friend in half pleasure, half confusion.

Shall it be confessed what was one secret at least of our bishop's preference for her? It was a good deal owing to a little fiction of Mr. Parker's, who had that morning rallied the bishop on his rather marked *penchant*:

"What would you say, my lord, to a certain young lady saying *naïvely* that she always thought bishops were cross and ugly; whereas she finds one here,—but I won't go on."

"Oh, nonsense—nonsense!" said the bishop highly pleased, and looking down at his legs, which were really good workmanship.

Mr. Churchill retired, a little resentfully, to the place

indicated. To say the truth he was not pleased with one "who would spoil everything ;" and indeed he thought it a slight that she should have been preferred to her clever father. Mrs. Surtees found small profit in his companionship—he being *distract*, and indifferent even to her open reverence and admiration.

The bishop was hungry, and again making "as hearty a meal as anyone." He was again drooped over his plate, looking to the right and left, and talking fluently as he helped himself, eat or sipped.

Mr. Churchill, uneasily and with some wonder, saw Polly talking freely to the dignitary, and the latter smiling pleasantly, and putting his head down on one side to listen.

The clergyman grew very uncomfortable and sour—"She is spoiling everything with her fiddle-faddle talk"—an indifference that did not at all abate Mrs. Surtees' attention and reverence. She plied him with compliments on that sermon, and protested what longing she felt to hear him again.

"Yes, I shall preach on Sunday again," he said. "I suppose the party will be here, the bishop,—do you know?"

"Oh dear, yes. The bishop stays till Monday."

This put Mr. Churchill in better humour.

"Oh, I shall give you something good on that day, something very different. Last Sunday it was for the boors of the place,—the common run of article, you must know."

"And how do you find time," asked the lady in admir-

ation, "with the house to manage, and all that? I suppose your daughter——"

The clergyman had his eye on Polly, who was very animated at that moment.

"Oh, indeed, yes," he said, "most of that has to come on me. I find I must do most things myself, to have them properly done."

"But now, I suppose, Miss Polly will return, to look after things, as there is no one at your house?"

This struck him as a new view—something like a suggestion.

"Ah, very true. Yes, of course she goes back. You know my dear Madam, we can't have it all holiday."

It was a pity he could not hear the confidential talk that was passing between Polly and the bishop. There was a little pause between the courses; the game was on its way from below, heralded by its peculiar fragrance. The bishop having dined "heartily" so far, and beginning to glow about the head, and to be suffused about the eyes, said, leaning back in his chair:

"Do you know, I like you, Miss Polly? You are a very nice, good girl. I have no daughter myself, I am sorry to say. Mrs. Talboys has gone many years. I have a couple of sons—one in the army—but you know sons are too busy to be affectionate: they have their wives and children. Dear! dear! But I tell you what, Miss Polly, I've a little plan that we must talk over together. Now if anything should happen to poor old Morgan—if this should prove, my dear, to be his final summons into

the great 'valley of the shadow'—why—why, I don't know but that we might do something for you. But mum, you know : all between you and me."

The delight, the joy of our Polly may be conceived ; she could have embraced "the good old man," as he appeared to her. Never was she so convinced of the almost divine and spiritual character of the bishops of her church. Her face was all lit up with joy and happiness ; she was like a child.

"What shall I say ? How shall I thank you ?"

Mr. Churchill saw this from afar, and became miserable ; the absurd "unidead" girl was ruining all.

The bishop looked round restlessly.

"A little of that sparkling hock again ; it is really uncommonly good ; I must lay in some at Dunthorpe next year. And now," to Polly, "tell me about Grainger : how do you like him now ? I fear you will find difficulty in dealing with him ; he has really no self-control, and wants proper respect for those who are above him in ability, years, and station. He is ungoverned, my dear, exceedingly so ; and I confess I look forward to your marriage with some misgivings. It may all come right, of course."

Polly sighed and cast down her eyes.

"He has been very good and kind to me."

The Squire now called out : "I say, Churchill, they are going to start with the viaduct again. I saw fellows down there to-day. What d'ye say to old Burgess—he's made out his five-and-twenty shillings in the pound, after all ; but not before they have nearly

killed him. I knew he was sound all the time. But he'll never be the same man again. Never !”

Here was news ! Polly listened with a little flutter, and something like joy. Again Mr. Churchill's ears worked.

“He has one son in the Church,” said the bishop, gently. (“What melons you have ! No, no, the ginger, please.”) “He has a son in the Church, who is a good deal of a favourite with the bishop there—Dr. Tongue. When I was at the palace a very proper looking young man came in, and I recollect distinctly asking Tongue his name, and he said he was the son of a contractor called Burgess. It must be the same.”

Very soon the ladies went away. As Polly left the room and the gentlemen were all standing up “at ease,” as it were, to let them pass, smiling with the regulation vacuity, Mr. Churchill eagerly seized the opportunity, and, glass in hand, stole round, and by a sort of *coup de main* carried, in the sense of storming, the chair next the bishop.

The face of that prelate, looking after the disappearing ladies and turning then to the right, underwent an almost comic change as he saw who was his new neighbour. But the latter had a kind of interested obsequiousness.

“I wished to ask your lordship a very particular question—I mean about that young Burgess you saw with the bishop.”

“Oh, to be sure ! Pray send on the wine ; the Squire is looking at you.”

"Would you say, my lord," the clergyman asked, eagerly, "he was a favourite with the bishop?"

"Well, yes; well, yes! Squire, capital this; better than yesterday."

"I thought you'd like it," said the Squire. "I laid that down eighteen years ago, and took every glass that Lubbock could give me."

"But this young man, my lord," said the persevering Mr. Churchill, "was not his secretary, or chaplain, was he, my lord?"

"Oh, I don't know; he might be—yes. No one more likely than Tongue to do a thing of that sort. By the way, I have been telling something to Miss Polly that concerns you—for your benefit—which you shall know in good time, Sir."

"My lord!" said the clergyman, in a tumult of amazement and delight, and making as though he would throw himself at the episcopal feet among the napkins. "My lord! No! This is too good—too generous!"

"Hush! hush!" said the bishop, testily. "Don't make a noise, or worry me. Dear me, do you know, I am a little tired with the day, Squire; but I have made a capital dinner—a full dinner."

His lordship's eyes were blinking a little and "filling up" fast. He had an air of dreamy satiety; and Mr. Churchill, asking him a question, was mortified at receiving no answer.

Presently the gentlemen began to "escape" to the ladies, one by one. The doctor, Mr. Parker—but not Mr.

Churchill : his friend, his "saint," was beside him, in a rather heavy dose.

"We mustn't disturb the bishop," said the Squire. "Come up, Churchill : we'll leave Arthur with him."

And much to his reluctance, the clergyman was taken away. Polly was at the piano. Mrs. Surtees was in ambuscade for her clergyman, who was now in infinitely better humour, and set himself to being agreeable.

"Don't sing my song," said the Squire, "for your life, Miss. We must keep that until the bishop comes up. Do you know, I am getting jealous of his lordship. He is quite making up to my sweetheart there. Sing us something else—an Irish melody ; always excepting 'The Last Rose,' which I am tired of."

And Polly, without more pressing, began "When through life unblest we rove," which she discoursed very sweetly.

While she was in the second verse, the door was opened suddenly, and a servant half entered very hastily, then stopping and looking round in a sort of scared way. The impatience of the Squire at this behaviour was extraordinary. He motioned furiously to the man to be quiet, and go out ; and indeed, in the Squire's house, as in many others, the servants had a knack of entering triumphantly with trays of clattering things exactly in the middle of a song. But this servant stood *ebahi*, as it were, still looking about for some one. At last the Squire rose and went to him.

"What the d—— is it ? What d'ye mean ?"

"Oh ! Sir, his lordship—where's the doctor, Sir ?"

All heard this. The music stopped. The doctor, with a quick professional instinct, had heard his own name, and came forward. And now the son of the house rushed in a little excitedly :

“Where’s the doctor? Come down, quick.”

The confusion of such a moment may be conceived.

That heaviness about the eyes and head of the bishop had been increasing steadily, rising into his head like a tide. He had indeed dined too “heartily;” and been dining heartily far too often. And the spectacle that met their eyes as they went down—the florid face fallen back, the gaping mouth, the stiff, rigid lines, the strained neck seen from the opened collar, showed that the dreadful familiar “apoplexy” had seized on him. He was taken away to bed, and the usual desperate remedies applied. A man on horseback was sent away to the nearest town to telegraph for his lordship’s own physician, who knew his constitution. That gentleman arrived betimes in the morning. But he could do nothing. He had warned again and again: the bishop had had hints from within, but he would dine “heartily.” He could not help it. At the sight of the pleasant dinner, the rich juices, and grateful wines, all resolution gave way. The two doctors burnt and scalded, and applied their almost savage remedies. But it would not do—the claws of this “devil-fish” among maladies would not let go. They closed tighter about him. He never spoke again. And in the *The Globe* of two nights after, the clergymen and others read :—

"DEATH OF THE BISHOP OF DUNMORE. We regret to announce the death of this exemplary prelate, which occurred suddenly at Godfrey Hall, Cumberley, on Thursday night. His lordship had been in his usual health and spirits, and had been the life and soul of the dinner table, when he was seized with a stroke of apoplexy. He never rallied, and expired about noon the next day. The deceased bishop was endeared to all who knew him for his kindly nature, his large heart, and abundant charities. This calamity has plunged the whole neighbourhood, where he was well known and respected, into the profoundest grief."





CHAPTER XXXV.

LETTER FROM INDIA.

POLLY was deeply affected. She grieved over him as over a near relative. Nor were her tears caused by the disappointment which the death had caused her. He had been kind to her and liked her.

But how was her father affected? The party at Godfrey Hall broke up and fell away at once. "Under the circumstances" all went home promptly. When the awful guest Death arrives, all common guests hide their faces and depart. He must have the whole house given up to him and to the family. But Mr. Churchill? He was really overwhelmed by the blow. He did not speak a word until they got home, where the change to the almost squalor of their domestic establishment was complete. The mean little "cabin," the penury, the humble dress of the children struck even Polly. The lamps were extinguished, the colours faded, the flowers withered, the poetry gone. Here was dull, cold prose.

Then Mr. Churchill's disappointment broke out.

"Nice work all this is. Nice mess you've made. All the trouble of years gone for nothing! No, but you must meddle in everything. You know more than your father, of course. I wish to Heaven you'd leave my concerns alone, and not busy yourself about me. I saw you talking and worrying the man. Why couldn't you leave it to me? I had it all arranged. I had brought him over. I had a promise out of him."

"But, papa dearest, isn't it all the same, as the poor bishop is no more?"

"It's not all the same," he answered savagely. "Of course, it is to you, who have to sit and look gentle and talk folly all day. It isn't to me, that have to slave for the whole. I declare I'll run away out of the place and leave the whole concern. Selfish, selfish pack."

He had often used this unkind and unmerited word to Polly, and it had never affected her. But somehow coming, as she now did, from the kindly faces and the midst of generous hearts, from the cloud of sympathies and affections, it gave her a sort of pang; and for the first time it flashed on her, not that she herself was neglected or unjustly reproached, which she would not have minded, but that her father did not care for or understand her. This came on her all of a sudden, like some dreadful revelation, and seemed in one moment to overwhelm her by taking all her interest in life away. She stood looking at him. There were some newly-arrived letters on the table. One was in tissue paper. He knew the writing. "India!" he said. "That's from him! How coolly he writes. Then I tell you what,"

he added, turning sharply on her, "I've made up my mind about that. I'll stop it, never fear, and this business has settled it. I'll not put up with his impudence longer. Not I. Why should I? I'm not to be sacrificed to the humours of others, and I'll just write to him this very night and break it off."

"Oh! papa," said Polly, "our honour is pledged to him. We could not."

"We could, though, and we shall. What good is he to me now? Oh! you'll see; take it away; I don't want to read his stuff. Where's that gone?—nothing—nothing in this house ever in its place."

What did he want? The invaluable "Dodd." With its accustomed spring, his mind was already travelling away on a new track. Who was Doctor Tongue? What was known about him? What was this fancy about young Burgess? How strange that he had never thought of that young man's being in the Church. He must find him, for he had always had an interest in his brother, the hard-working, well-intentioned, high-spirited young man. About that well-intentioned, high-spirited young man, he could write to know. He was naturally anxious, not having heard of him so long.

"Dodd" was very unsatisfactory about Dr. Tongue, the Lord Bishop of Gravesend. There was no pamphlet or book mentioned; no "Sermons" even, and yet there must have been. It was in the nature of things. Stay, there was a "Commission for the Inquiry into the Combination of Small Livings." If he could only get hold of that report! The bishop must have

said something or delivered some weighty views on so really important a subject. He would write to London ; the parliamentary papers were always in stock ; and after that a letter to the bishop himself would be appropriate. "MY LORD, — Interest in the brother of a young man whom I have long known, and who I believe is deservedly held in high esteem by your lordship," &c. &c. This would do well for an introduction. Then a happy allusion to the commission : "I write to your lordship from the small living of Cumberley : one of that class about which, so many years ago, you dropped words of wisdom, unfortunately not heeded then, and which several even now" — (Quotation to follow. In another draught of the rev. gentleman's letter it was put, to suit the event : "words of wisdom, which I recall now, and have brought such profit and blessings to the State." Not having the commission by him, he could not reasonably be expected to determine the matter at once).

Polly meanwhile had stolen away to her room to read her Indian letter ; but before she could do that in comfort she had much private kissing and embracing to go through from the children, who had missed her terribly. Then she sat down, and was a little confounded at the new tone and length of her affianced husband's letter. It ran :—

"CAMP—,

"DEAREST POLLY,

"I sit down to write a long letter to you ; and a very long one I am afraid you will think it. You will see by

the address that since I last wrote we have moved some hundred miles. In short what I have long foretold—only no one heeded me—has happened ; we are in the midst of war. We have had two bloody battles, in which I have lost a horse, and to-morrow are to storm a fortress here. I am to be of the party. I have a presentiment that I shall not get back safe ; it may be a foolish one, but I feel conviction of its truth, and now, at nearly midnight, I want to speak to you in a different way to what I have ever done before.

“ My dear Polly, I know very well, and knew when I left you, the impression I left behind on you the last time I saw you : that of a stiff, cold, even heartless being. Such an impression I meant to leave. Perhaps I am such by this time. But I was not always so, and I did not mean to be so for the future. But to-morrow will come the end, as I believe ; and I had better tell you the truth.”

Polly's heart began to flutter as she read these strange hints ; and yet already she was full of sympathy, and seemed to share the presentiment which he felt. Yet the letter was written weeks—almost months before.

“ As you have begun to know the bishop, has *he* never told you of my poor mother, and *her* fate ? Most likely not. It was a thing that would not make much impression on him, and fell into a mere shape of business matter. I had a sister, too—Mary Grainger—who was called, just as you are, Polly—and my mother, a young

creature ; and we were all so happy. I am not going to dawdle over anything romantic ; but I may say that my mother died,—was a gentle creature, —and my father grieved after her for three or four years ; and then married a woman with money, and also with a carping, demoniac temper, that turned the house into a place for devils. She was not passionate, but always carping and worrying and sneering, not at me, who was at school and whom she saw seldom, but at our gentle and unfortunate Polly. Weary, wretched days and nights they were for *her*. As I learned after, her step-mother hated her, and found in that treatment some indemnity for the poor girl's living so long. My father was a weak man, and did not stand up for her as he ought to have done ; and—not to be longer—one night I was summoned home from college by the news that she was ill and dying. I did not arrive in time. I loved that girl in a way you cannot conceive, who have only known me of late ; but as I told you, I was very different then—gentle, trusting, and believing that all men and women were good and generous, and that it was a charming world. I heard it all from him and from a servant—my poor Polly had been worn and fretted out of the world. But I had my retribution. I laid myself out for that, and I made her life wretched. I lived but for that one end, and made her feel all that she had made my sister suffer. Her life was a burden. I tortured her ; but in that time, and it lasted six or seven years, I suffered myself as much as her ; and at the end I had changed myself into the cold, cruel, almost hateful being that you found me.

“I told you how I laid myself out to meet the world : to give it as good as I fancied it had given me—to meet no one with kindness—to be unthankful and ungracious to those superior, to grind down those below me. I enjoyed the reputation I was making. I liked it to be said that I was hated, and that ‘the men’ would hoot me if they got a chance. I am sure they would. Perhaps they may get a chance to-morrow.

“I met the world as I fancied it met me, and with interest. It was in this state of mind that I found myself, when I was obliged to go to that meeting—obliged, I say, because I cared nothing about the soldiers or the wives they left behind. Who had the least sympathy for me? I recollect thinking that very morning I was half-listening to their platitudes, and thinking how much vanity was mistaken for charity, when your father came in, or tried to come in ; and beside him was a face that seemed to suggest to me my lost sister. There is really no likeness in the face or figure, for she was taller and larger ; but at times a sort of light and look came across your face that was like. It made me thrill, especially a sort of imploring look you have at times. And then I heard your voice, begging that man to let you pass. That was the strangest of all ; it went to my heart. From that moment your presence had the strangest effect on me ; from that moment it seemed to me almost as if she was alive ; from that time a battle went on within me between the old nature, and a new one that was trying to assert itself. I felt something always drawing me towards *you*, and from *you*. I came away happier and better.

"Then I soon discovered that I was not to be loved by you ; but I saw your goodness, your honour and nobleness, your utter unselfishness, and, selfishly myself, determined that once you had consented I would make up for everything, and in time teach you to like me. Forgive me for this ; for I saw your love for your father, and took an ungenerous advantage. But I say solemnly you should never have regretted it.

"If you knew what a comfort—what a delight your image, the very thought of you, has been to me in these lonely places here ! How the idea that something of *her* was left to me has cheered and warmed my frozen heart, I cannot describe to you. Perhaps I have done wrong—selfishly, certainly—but now, on the eve of what I believe will be a day of moment and fate, I sit up to write all this, to show you myself as I am, and tell you how much I love you, and to ask forgiveness for the sacrifice I obtained of you. If my presentiment of to-morrow should be false, I shall not hold you to what you have undertaken, though you might think it fit to be indulgent, and think it a charity to make the life of one only too unworthy of you happy. But I must say no more now. I hear the bugles, and must have done. But I have told you all. I shall think, at least, you will—no ! the recollection of me that you might have had—and if all should be well,—but I must have done. I write as if I could only have an answer to this, and I am writing as though I could. But this is impossible. Good-bye, dearest. Forgive me."

Polly read this surprising document over several times.

Every genuine story of the kind won her sympathy ; but this sort of tale, a nature having the reputation of being hard and cruel so unjustly, was more specially calculated to act on her feelings. Long ago she had trained herself in accepting the lot that her father had laid for her, and tried to take it cheerfully, and assume that it was good for her. Duty and affection made it easier for her than for other girls. Yet now her eyes travelled over with at least pity and interest to the cold and friendless being sitting in his tent writing. Then she thought how long ago that had been written, and something like anxiety and a wish to know more succeeded.





CHAPTER XXXVI.

A FIRST MISGIVING.

SHE sat there a long, long time, in a sort of dream, with the letter in her hand. Her window was open—a sort of casement overgrown with thick leaves. The sun gradually went down, and it grew darker. She was roused by her father's voice calling. Then she recollected that it was long past the time for his tea.

She found him quite changed and in good spirits again. "Dodd" had done the work. He had written letters, as we have seen, to Doctor Tongue; and had received a gracious reply from that eminent prelate—a passage which might run: "I am surprised at you remembering my poor utterances on that commission. I believe they did do *some* good, though unacknowledged. But that is all I care for. I hope when you are in this part of the world you will make a point of calling on me," &c.

He *had* been in that part of the world—had made a point of calling, we may be pretty sure of that—had dined. The bishop had said to young Burgess—“A most agreeable, well-informed man—so different from the common rustic run. I wish we had him in our diocese. I dare say we could tempt him, eh?” In fact, scarcely a less number of events could have happened to the “Arabian Nights” gentleman who dipped his head into the tub of water and drew it out again.

“Polly,” said he, “I have quite decided about you. That fellow Grainger has always been too free and easy, and insolent. It’s outrageous and beyond bearing, and I’ll not put up with him any longer.”

“Oh, papa!” said Polly. “Why?”

“Why? Every why! This why.* If he had something to go on and take airs on, but he hasn’t. I’ve no notion of that sort of thing, humbugging honest men, and he has tried to humbug me. He’s not a man of honour, or of his word; for where’s his bishop now?”

“Oh, papa, we could not treat anyone in that way. We have given our word, and he counts on it, and we must stand by it.”

There was something so earnest and even independent in her manner and tone, something so unusual, that he turned to look at her.

“What are you at now?” he said. “What d’ye mean, girl? What have you in your head now? I see. I suppose you are taking airs on the good

company you have been in. Always the way. Selfish ! —selfish ! ”

This brought the colour to Polly’s cheeks.

“ Indeed I am not, papa ! I don’t wish to be, and it is unkind of you to say so. I agreed to this—Heaven knows at what a sacrifice, and even injustice—to please you ! Now I am ready to go through with it. Only read this letter, and you will see that we are bound in all honour.”

Annoyed at this rebellion, he looked down at the letter put into his hand.

“ I can’t wade through all this stuff,” he said ; then paused, and said triumphantly, “ Well, I do read it. What’s this ? Why the man releases you at once. See here. Why he wants to be off it himself, and I’ll take him at his word. A fresh piece of impudence ! But you’ve no sense or understanding, and now take to arguing with your father and laying down the law. But I’ll take it on myself. I suppose you won’t fly in my face, eh ? Is that to be the next thing ? God help us ! What a life it is ! One disappointment, then another, and having to work on all the time for a set of thankless people that will do nothing for you ! Go away ; leave me ; and do as you like.”

This was a very trying way to put it for our Polly. She felt that she had done him wrong. That picture he had rushed in with a stroke or two of “ one disappointment after the other,” went to the centre of her gentle heart and wrung it. She advanced to him with her soft face fixed, and a “ Indeed, dearest——”

But he drew back. "Go away, now, and don't worry. I want none of those false endearments;" and she had to go up stairs, thoughtful and troubled; and passed a yet more troubled night.





CHAPTER XXXVII.

RUMOURS.

THE party at Godfrey Hall had been broken up as just mentioned by the unfortunate catastrophe of the bishop. Mr. Parker and others had gone away ; Mrs. Surtees alone remained—one of those adhering guests whom good-natured hosts are far too nice to hurt by more than a hint, and who, when that fails, are content to suffer with patience. Mrs. Surtees was very comfortable, and had tact enough to make herself agreeable to the Squire, first, by not boring him or keeping too much in his company ; and next, by a little confidence which she imparted to him, and which he enjoyed immensely.

“Do you know, I remarked it, Ma’am ! I saw it in the corner of the parson’s eye. It would be the best thing in the world for him and his small family. Yes, it would, Ma’am. I’ve set my heart on it, Ma’am ; so there’s no use talking.”

It will thus be seen that the lady had rather artfully contrived to make the matter come from Mr. Godfrey himself.

Between her and Miss Godfrey there was no great cordiality. That young lady fancied she detected the arrangement Mrs. Surtees had in view, though she disdained to affect to know of it, even in spite of her father's nods and all but open allusions.

"It was a devilish good thing," he said, "for Churchill. Mrs. S. had a good snug jointure which would keep them both handsomely." The snug jointure was a thousand a year.

In pursuance of his plan, the reverend gentleman was often asked out to the Hall to dinner; and to do him justice, he repaired there with no very great alacrity. Alas! there was no bishop there now; and the recollection of the cup of preferment which had been so rudely dashed from his lips, always affected him. He had begun also to understand the widow's design; he would have been sadly obtuse had he not comprehended the Squire's nods and nudges and speeches about "a fine woman" and "a snug jointure of a thousand a year—every penny of it, Sir." But his heart was ambitious; he would have preferred *any* sort of advancement or promotion. It was not long before Mrs. Surtees, by no means a sharp woman, discovered this, and went away, so to speak, on that tack. She began to cast about as to whether in the direction of her own relatives she had not some one who could be of profit in this way. What family of ordinary decency and repute but cannot muster

a parson or two, or a cousin or sister married to a curate, parson, or archdeacon? She remembered a very distant third or second cousin, married to an Irish archdeacon Malone. This dignitary she began to introduce pretty often. Now, though Mr. Churchill had but a poor opinion of the Irish branch of the Establishment, looking on it pretty much as the gentlemen of the army do upon their brethren of the militia, this constant iteration began at last to affect Mr. Churchill with some curiosity, and made him ask questions about Archdeacon Malone, the extent of his Irish influence and patronage; until at last he began to think that perhaps he might have made a mistake in leaving this Irish Eldorado so long unworked.

All this time Polly was in a state of eager anxiety. What woman after that letter but would not have felt an interest in the writer, or say curiosity, from the almost dramatic circumstances under which it was written? Naturally, she would wish to know the event; but the mail would not be in for another week. The battle was not one of the grand decisive battles which required anything special. Miss Godfrey, her friend, came down very often, rather welcoming the opportunity of escape from her visitor, Mrs. Surtees; and they had much confidential talk on private matters. Her father went very often to dine, but usually went alone; and it seemed, on the whole, a better arrangement. And while he feasted and was courted and flattered up at the Hall, the old custom was restored, and Polly sat at home patiently with the children, and tried to bring her mind

back into the old tone of drudgery, and perhaps into that old trusting belief which had made her father the most perfect of mortal clergymen, and the one that loved her. She had this long meditation. Still no news came to her; she often thought of Harry, but of him she had quite lost sight; and since he had left them she had never even heard of him. Polly had a certain pride of her own, and she had made the resolution from the day of his departure to try and wean her heart from all that association at the least.

But now, to the astonishment and delight of the village, arrives one morning along the tramway a whole train of waggons, and on the waggons some fifty or sixty strong men. Again the fires were lighted in the cold engines, and again the bricklayers began to crawl over the clear-cut stone piers and brickwork, which had been left very much like a well cut-up cake. Now chains began to clank, and the strong men to go down into the damp-looking cylinders with lanterns. In short the great Cum-berley Viaduct was being constructed by the great firm; and here was Burgess and Younghusband rehabilitated, with their horses and waggons, and windlasses, and engines, and navvies. But, alas! Burgess, the self-reliant, self-made man, who had raised himself from a depth (morally) as far down as one of his own cylinders, had after a struggle given way to the mortification, and had been struck down by an all but mortal illness. There had been a cruel combination against him both of enemies and events; but he had shown triumphantly that he could pay his five-and-twenty shillings in the pound.

This event had some significance for Polly, and it was with a profound agitation that she heard the news. But there was a new young engineer, Mr. Pender; who also, like his predecessor, stayed at the "Speed the Plough," talked with the landlady, and asked questions about the pretty girl he saw smiling "in the parson's." For this gentleman was of a different pattern from Harry Burgess—had not that reverence with which every gentlemanly mind speaks of absent ladies—and had rather the flippant pertness with which "the commercial travelling" mind views such matters. Harry Burgess—if Mrs. Holden could have recollected—had asked about "that nice-looking young lady in the window." His successor put a question about "a clipping tip-topper of a gal." Most likely Mrs. Holden thought this last form the most expressive.

She gave him, as usual, a good "ben" of the parish gossip.

"Her father—Churchill—is to be married—I know it—to the widow up at the Godfreys'. It is as good as settled—if not already—for I have it all from Mrs. Hitchcock, their housekeeper, who has her eyes on the business and must know, if anyone did. And I can tell *you*, Mr. Pender, Miss Polly aint pleased—as how could she be, poor thing, having a woman of that sort hoist in on top of her? And so she sits at home there with the children, and never goes next or nigh the place. And Miss Godfrey comes down to see *her* when she has occasion."

This was an ingenious yet not at all unnatural explanation of Polly's seclusion. At least one that the

parish was quite entitled to give in default of more official information. We need hardly say that Polly, though she could not misunderstand the Squire's nudges and nods, had never dreamed of such a thing as being even conceivable *in rerum natura*. As well pillage a shrine, drag down the statue of her gracious Sovereign standing in the market-place of the next town, as offer such an insult to the memory of the departed saint. That last dreadful scene, when she took leave and passed gently to heaven, as our Polly most fervently believed, was ever present to her. Her friend who knew what she felt, could not bring herself to hint at what she knew was coming on fast.

Mrs. Surtees' cousin—the Archdeacon Malone's "lady"—had been "inspired" to write over fuller and more highly coloured details. His bishop was a most "charming man"—Bishop Boulger, with whom the archdeacon could do anything. Need we say that "Dodd" had again to give up information about this prelate and his writings? Our clergyman was not in the least daunted by the blank silence unaccountably preserved by the Rev. Mr. Burgess' bishop in reference to a most complimentary letter, which also alluded to a "commission" in which "his lordship had sat many years before. Bishop Boulger had stood up manfully when plain Doctor Boulger, rector of Tinvalley, to the Rev. Mr. Murphy, P.P., in that 'immortal' discussion, which lasted five days, at the Rotunda." This was glad news for Mr. Churchill, and he acted accordingly.



CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A DISCOVERY.

BUT now a momentous day had come round for our Polly. The day for the mail from India had passed by, but no letter had come for her. She wondered; but was sure that another day would bring her tidings. Cumberley was not considered very highly in the postal arrangements, a very tiny and collapsed bag being tossed out contemptuously as the mail went by.

But on the next morning—a bright one, and full of augury—came letters, but all for Mr. Churchill. He read one with sparkling eyes.

“Ah! ah!” he said to her, “trust me for managing a thing.”

It concerned the missing Bishop Tongue, the bishop of the commission, and was from the young Rev. Mr. Burgess, Harry’s brother.

“The bishop mentioned the other day your name before me, and wondered who you were. I was for-

unately enabled to tell him, having heard my brother mention your name. Many thanks for your kind mention of him and me in your letter; and as the bishop will shortly put me in a position of which I fear I am rather unworthy, if my little services can then be of use, I hope you will not scruple to ask for them."

"There!" said Mr. Churchill, emphatically, "what did I tell you?"

Simply nothing, he having never made any statement in reference to the matter, and Polly never having ventured to contradict it.

"You will be glad to hear that Harry has been doing wonderfully well, and is in a high position out there——"

"Out where?" said Mr. Churchill, with reasonable impatience.

"We expect him over by this mail, as he is wanted to manage things during my father's illness."

"There's news for you!" said the rev. gentleman, gaily. "Nothing but bright prospects opening on all sides; the difficulty is what to choose. As for that Irish fellow, Malone, *he* may stand by. I am very glad of all this, and for your sake, too, Polly. Between ourselves, we treated poor Burgess badly enough; but we are all creatures of circumstances, all of us. (This was as much as to say "even I.") But now, you see, it is quite a different thing."

Polly turned a little pale.

"How, dearest?" she said.

The little cloud between them had passed off, and she was beginning to believe in this parental Mokanna again.

"How? every how. Why hasn't this fellow Grainger behaved infamously—like no gentleman? Hasn't he broken his engagements? But no matter; no, don't talk to me. I have to write now ever so much."

In great alarm Polly went up to him.

"Oh, no, no, papa! At least we must wait for the day. Indeed you must!" she added with vehemence.

Her father looked at her and then turned to his desk without answering—a common habit of his. He wrote many letters that morning; then set out, as he told her, to pay a visit at the Godfreys'.

It was a fine summer's day, fresh and balmy. Never did Cumberley look so rich in its green. Polly loved the place, and would have been content to live and die there. She found an indemnification in its pleasant air and landscape for her polite slavery.

She had a weary morning, for the children were specially troublesome, and with the uncertainty and restlessness of her mind, and the bright sun outside—always a persistent invitation to go forth—she did not apply herself very resolutely to her tasks. When she had at last done she sat down in her father's study, and looked out pensively at the green branches swaying gently outside in the softest of sunny breezes. And then she held a little council over her little troubles.

Suddenly she heard the wooden gate clap to. She started, and rose hastily, for her father would resent this invasion of his study even in his absence. But before she could leave there was a figure standing in the doorway—Harry Burgess! Surprise, pleasure—even joy

filled her heart, and forced a cry of "Dear Harry!" from her. He was altered—graver, more manly, and with that composed air of service which gives a man a sort of dignity. His face was well bronzed. She was really overjoyed; yet a little awed at his grave manner.

"And where have you been, dear Harry?" she said; "and why did you not write, or at least tell us? We could not find out what had become of you."

"What did it matter?" he said. "I have been in India, on railroads and other business."

"What! Where *he* was? And you saw him—Well?"

"Don't be alarmed," he said, hastily; "he is safe. He passed through that danger with his life, but barely with his life."

"Yes?" said Polly, in much agitation.

"Yes," he went on slowly. "He received dreadful wounds, which have disfigured him sorely; but though his state was dangerous, he could not stay over there. I was fortunate enough to be near him, and was of use, I believe. I came down with him, as he *would* be moved, and went on board ship with him."

"What!" said Polly, starting. "He has left then?"

"Yes," said he, hastily. "He has arrived—he is in England. He is not ten miles away. And now I have come over to tell you this, that if you would come and see him you might do him more good than any doctor. That was his message."

Polly looked round, as if to seize her bonnet.

"We shall have to wait some time," he said. "The train does not go by for more than an hour."

"Then I can run and see papa," said Polly, in a flutter. "He is only up at the Godfreys'. Of course we must go. Oh, Harry! I pity him so. I did not know him until lately, when he told me his history; and it was a very piteous one indeed. But he is ill; I am sure he is in danger."

"Well," said Burgess, in the same grave tone, "it would be idle to conceal from you that it is serious. He has been desperately wounded—in the head and face, cruelly; and, indeed, it is wonderful how he has made the battle he *has* done. But, as he said, he was *determined* to get home."

They were now walking along the road to the Hall.

"And you?" said Polly, looking at him. "How like you this is! How generous! How noble! And after the way we behaved to you."

"No, no!" he said, hastily; "that is all past and gone. A dream, and a dream of *mine*: such a foolish one! I fancied I was secure; but I always teach myself to consider that a whole lifetime has passed between that time and the present: that I have begun again, in fact. It is wonderful how you can succeed in driving back your thoughts, if you have but some absorbing and gigantic business on hand. It was a little cruel at first, and the other blow coming at the same time; but I fought *both* off. Time and occupation do a great deal. As for Grainger, that was but common charity."

With that he told the whole story of the battle, and of Grainger's bravery and prodigies of valour—how they had been beaten back, and he had led them on again and

again. Then he gave her details of his illness, and even of his ravings and mutterings in his fever, and how her name had been on his lips, whether wandering or sensible.

"Generous of me," added Harry Burgess, smiling, "is it not, to tell all this? But there is no merit; for I like the man, and pity him so for his dreadful sufferings, and for what, perhaps, he will have to suffer yet—poor, poor fellow!"

There was a mystery in this which Polly had not courage to ask to be resolved. And indeed it was the delicacy of Harry, which merely hinted such things, and thus prepared her for something which he had not courage to tell.

They were now at the back gate of Godfrey Hall. "Wait here," said Polly, with secrecy. "I shall run in and find papa, and bring him away. I shall not be long." Harry remained on that little retired spot, looking at the sky pensively; now gazing round at the charming country which he had not seen for so long, and which brought back to him a hundred associations.

Polly passed through the little gate, and was long seen fading out among the trees. That pretty figure turned, looked back to him with a gentle nod, and then disappeared.

This back entrance was close to the house, and a little path led winding to the garden where the greenhouse was—which was indeed almost a part of the drawing-room, being more solid than such things are—with a few statues scattered about.

Polly hurried along, tripped up the steps, and was entering the conservatory when she was stopped by the sound of voices and the irresistible spell which the sound of one's own name always has. Principle, delicacy, restraint, everything must give way before this curious instinct, and the purest of us passing a door or open window must pause and listen. The motion is well nigh mechanical. In our Polly's instance it was surprise and indecision. She hardly knew whether to retreat or go on. What she heard was: "But my dear Sir, what would you do with your daughter Polly? Then she heard—oh, what cruel stabs in every syllable for her!—her father's voice, fluent and contemptuous: "Oh! that won't stand in my way. She must either do as I want, or provide for herself. There is an aunt that might take her. She positively is a drawback to my getting on. You know, my dear Mrs. Surtees, *selfishness* in a girl is a thing," &c.

Some one was plunging a dagger into her.

Polly could have sank down at these dreadful words, every one of which went through her young heart. She fell back against the door, and though there was not a couple of feet between her and her father, it seemed at that moment as if some cruel magician had removed her a whole life away from him—nay, had taken the scales from her eyes, dispelled that cloud of soft love in which he had moved, and shown him now a mere parson, white-tied, hard of face, cold—one of those who might pass her by in the street. Some ogre had laid his hand on her heart, and chilled it of a sudden. Down went the fanciful, the darling idol, which had been reverently placed on

her chimney-piece so many years, and was shattered into a thousand fragments. No one could ever put the fragments together again. She was astounded at the change herself, and stood there leaning against the door scarcely able to move. The agony of that moment! She looked longingly after the dear image so long loved, as it faded away. She stole back, took a short turn round the garden to recover herself, then entered the house by the front door. She waited in the drawing-room some time. No one came. Miss Godfrey was out with the Squire. At last she heard a footstep and a tune hummed softly, and her father entered.

He started when he saw her.

"God bless me!" he said. "What on earth is it now?"

Had he seen the change in Polly's face? She felt a little shiver, then the cruel words came back upon her, "he would get rid of her," and hardened that soft face into firm lines. Yet she felt no anger—it was the intensity of disappointment. She told composedly what she had come for. "We must go to him at once. It is only proper, as he wishes it, and considering the relation we are in to him."

"Then indeed we shall do no such thing!" he answered, impatiently. "I have no notion of it, I can tell you. I have settled all that. He has got my letter by this time."

"What?" said Polly, drawing herself up. "Then, *what* has been written to him? I am entitled to know now!"

Her father started at this new tone.

"None of these tragedy airs and nonsense ! It was I settled all this originally, and I unsettle it now. Have you no sense of your father's dignity ? He's treated me infamously—cheated me. Get these follies out of your head, and leave the matter to me."

"Then I must go myself," said Polly, in the same calm tone. "That is all."

Mr. Churchill stared, and all but rubbed his eyes. He did not understand this.

"What's over you to-day ?" he said, much in the same tone as a profaner person would have said "What the devil's up now ?" "And who will you go with, pray ?"

"With Henry Burgess. He will take me."

Her father started.

"Oh, where is he ? Let me see him ! I am so glad of this ; I wanted to see him. Did he get my letter ?"

"I am going to him now," said Polly, turning away.

Her father was so eager he followed her, and they both came out in the road where Harry was waiting.

"My dear fellow !" said the clergyman, wringing the hand which the other gave him very coldly, "why, this *is* a surprise ! Why didn't you come up ? I had a letter from your nice brother this morning. I have it here somewhere. Tell me all about him ; I am dying to know. What's this about the bishop ?" added the clergyman, his face taking an anxious and peering look.

"Another time, Sir," said the young man gravely. "This is a pressing matter and cannot wait."

"Oh, as for that, I have changed my mind ! It

would be very improper to have a young girl going about the country ; and I can't let her go."

"Father, I must !" said Polly.

"But you surely cannot mean to break off with Grainger ? In his present state it would kill him !"

"My dear fellow, you don't understand. That was a mere little misunderstanding. I was very sorry after you went away, but I was undecided at the time ; and—and we'll talk the thing over to-day, if you stay to dinner."

"We have only twenty minutes to get to the train," he said turning away. "I shall be happy to go with you, Miss Polly, if you have no one else——"

They both turned away, and the clergyman was left there bewildered.





CHAPTER XXXIX.

MAJOR GRAINGER.

IN quiet lodgings in Irnston the unhappy major was lying. He had asked very impatiently all the day, "Had they come?" and "What o'clock was it?" At last, about three o'clock, his servant came softly into his room, and whispered that "Here they were." Then Harry Burgess entered, and behind him with a soft step, like an angel of light, our Polly. Thin and trembling fingers were held out to her. She came up close and caught them in both hers.

"Oh, you have come to me," he said, "and I see you at last. How I have dreamed—thought of you night and day all these weary months! But now you are here!—I see what you are looking at. You see what they have made of me?"

This was what Burgess had prepared her for. One side of his face and head was all covered up in black silk cloths. A dreadful fighting wound from an Indian sabre

had passed down his head and face ; but Polly was not thinking of that.

"You will get well again," she whispered. "We will get you well again. You will be quite restored, now that you are away from that dreadful place. Your friends—we, will take care of you."

He was very restless. Burgess had gone away to the window.

"You read all that," he said, "what I wrote you the night before? It was a long story; but I was right, you see. Ah! I knew there was something coming!"

"I did, indeed; and have read it often since. I have it here," said Polly touching her chest.

He smiled; a light of an overflowing affection beamed in his eyes.

"And why—why did your father write me that letter? He was right of course; but still he might have left it to me."

"I knew nothing of it, indeed," said Polly vehemently; "nothing in the world. It was never told to me."

"Never?" he said, eagerly. "I thought not; I was sure of it; you would not have put it so roughly. Why should he suppose I was so cruel and unreasonable? No, you are too good and too angelic. But why should he think me a savage, though? But he knew me when I looked and acted like one. Dearest Polly (if I may call you so), you understand me at least, and did not give me credit for so unkind a thought."

"But," said Polly, hesitating, and bending over him,

"do you mean, that this accident was to make any difference in—in—what I felt to you? If so——"

He half raised himself on his elbow; a strange look of grief and suspense came into his maimed face; he pointed to the black silk bands, and shook his head.

"There can be but one answer," he said.

"Yes, one answer," said Polly, with a devotion that made her seem to him like a saint—"one answer: that you are the same to me that you were before,—that I should be ashamed of the name of woman if I thought that a change like that made any difference; and that it will be my duty, love, and pride to be always to you the same as I was,—to attend on you in your distress, and carry out what I had so solemnly undertaken!"

A little shy at the excited tone in which she had made this declaration, Polly added, "Now we must not let you talk or excite yourself. But I have said this merely to put your mind at rest."

Grainger was speechless for a moment; then sank back on his pillows with a look of ineffable pleasure and delight. Then he shook his head sadly.

"Speak to the doctor," he said softly; "he will tell you. I only said that to try you. It will be only for a short time, dearest."

He could not speak for a long time; this excitement, though it soothed, exhausted him. He lay there, with her hand in his, and her gentle face before him. The lights were brought in, and she sat on; but her hour was drawing on, and it was time for her to go. Her father was to have dined at the Squire's; but she found him

when she returned late, sitting there impatient. She still felt the chill she had got at the greenhouse door when she saw him. He burst out at once.

"So this is the new line, is it, flying in the face of your father? But it is only what I might expect—ingratitude—*selfishness* right and left."

"I know," said Polly in a trembling voice. "I heard you say to-day in the greenhouse, that you would turn me out. Oh," added Polly, bursting into passionate tears, "how could you!—knowing all you did, that my heart was bound up in you, and that I would have died and sacrificed myself in any way for you—God knows I would—and make nothing of what I have done and borne all these years back! But what kept me up was the feeling that I was doing all this for a dear father, who bore with me and loved me! But now, father, I have another life before me. My duty you shall have as before, so far as consistent with other duties."

The astonishment, shame, and humiliation in Mr. Churchill's face was indescribable; he could only think of old commonplaces, and say:

"Well, and why were you listening? I didn't mean that, of course. But I am right; you do nothing for me. I meet nothing but this selfishness on every side. No one thinks of me, though I work—work from morning till night. Everyone wants to follow their own way and their own inclination. What do they care if I work myself into the grave?"

Only that morning, even these threadbare platitudes would penetrate Polly with compunction and compassion.

Now, her eyes, cruelly penetrating, unnaturally keen, as one who had been up all night, saw what theatrical shreds and patches they were. Not but that she would not have given the world to have had back her old faith. And an even stranger effect was produced on her father ; to whom she also appeared another person, with a little of his own hardness present, filling him even with a sort of awe and restraint in her presence. She was " wrung " and " heartsore," as the people about often said of themselves. She then proceeded to tell him calmly, and with an air of resolution he strove hard to fight against, the course she meant to take. Whatever she might have been persuaded into before, it was now impossible to go back. " Common honour, decency, and humanity, oblige me not to desert him now, no matter what the consequences."

" Yes, of course ; no matter what the consequences to me, now at the end of my days—worked to death—turned on by my ungrateful daughter. And what's to become of me, after all my labour and trouble ? There's Burgess now come back, when I had prepared everything, and reckoned on him and his brother. It's shameful ; it's disgraceful, and selfish, and undutiful. And you'll be made to repent your behaviour to the father whom God has set over you ; and who has worked for you all your life. Never mind ; it 'ill come in good time. And you'll be punished, never fear."

So for a long time after Polly had gone to her room he continued to denounce her.

Only the day before he would have found some comfort

in this arrangement—have begun a letter to the sick major, and found out some scheme; but this opposition quite upset him. He was filled with a sudden bitterness and venom to his child. He schemed and schemed, as he walked up and down, all sorts of plans of vengeance to descend on her head.

It was a night long recollected by father and daughter. Long after, when years had passed by—when of a soft evening she was lifting up the heavy tapestries of memory, and with her eyes shaded, as it were, looking out into the dim country beyond, she would turn away from this unpleasant night with a sort of shiver.





CHAPTER XL.

A SWEET NURSE.

AFTER that fatal night Polly went regularly to follow up the new duties she had undertaken. With all his "firmness of character," "worldly vigour of mind," and the rest, Mr. Churchill was a poor weak creature enough. A little show of resolution, and he "went down,"—grumbling, perhaps, but still went down.

It was not surprising, therefore, that when Polly, in her new, calm, cold tones, announced that they must go over to Irnstone and stay there for a short time, until *he* should be at least out of danger, and take lodgings near him, that what she proposed was done, after a faint protest, mutterings, grumblings, &c. She was indeed a little astonished at this almost ready compliance, and did not know that a rumour had come down to Cumberley that the newly-appointed bishop, the Rev. Samuel Buller, D.D., would live a good deal at Irnston while the palace

at Dunmore (they were charging the heirs of the late bishop with dilapidation) was being renovated. On the whole he found his stay in Irnston very agreeable, and he carried out the fiction of "a fresh field of labour," as though he had been appointed to a new and more expanded charge. It was a very agreeable change. Heaven knows how our Polly made out the sums necessary for this change, but contrive it she did. Faith will move mountains, and a firm will and earnestness will coin money. There were a few trinkets which she never wore after—but this is speculation.

But who shall describe the comfort, the light that visited the eyes of the wounded soldier as that gentle face every day appeared at the door, and was bent over him—as that gentler voice whispers to him, talks to him, and a soft hand arranges the black silk bandages. Doctors come and go—and go through their conventional histrionics. They are secretly surprised at his doing so well, which they set down to their own private skill. He does make an astonishing rally, but it is a doubtful battle. Often he talks with her, sitting in his arm-chair, his eyes half closed. And one night he told her of the dreadful Indian battle where he had suffered so: and then passed to what the young engineer had done for him—his kindness and tenderness.

"I did not know at that time—I mean when I was here—about that; at least I did not care. Now I begin to see all the sacrifice that you would have made. But happily it is not too late. There is no harm

done yet," he added, smiling sadly; "and if I have only the pleasure of seeing your face near me just for a short time longer, for it can't be more——"

"Hush!" said Polly, taking his hand. "I won't listen to you talking in that way. This poor face of mine is not such a wonderful talisman. We will have you quite well. The doctors give great hopes, and, I don't know—will it comfort you or make you happier my telling you this?" added Polly, with a great sweetness of nature and earnestness, which took away all air of mortal vanity from the speech—"but I do look forward to the days when you shall be quite well, and we shall be very happy together; and I shall be able to show you how I admire, love, and esteem your generosity and virtues. As for Harry Burgess," she went on in the same earnest tone, "you know, as well as I, what had passed between me and him. It gave us a great deal of pain at the time, when my father wished me to make the sacrifice, for it was one. But I seem to have lived years since then, and we cannot be always selfish and following out our own wishes; and I say again, if it is any comfort to you to know it, I feel convinced I shall be very happy and contented with you one day."

There was no parade or show of heroism in this speech. It was only a fresh instance of that sweet amiability which was so characteristic of our Polly, and who saw with some trouble that the sick man was uneasy and restless about what he knew must be her real feeling. And indeed her little life had been such a series of sacrifices, of the throwing of every pet inclination

under the cruel wheels of duty, that it came more or less easy to her, if not as a matter of course. She spoke as she felt, and had things been ordered so, would have lived contented and even happily in the new sphere.





L'ENVOI.

THE rest will not take so long in telling. Indeed, this little chronicle of Cumberley has been meant for no story, and does not rise to the dignity of story. We have been looking merely at these two characters, father and daughter, with the background of a village. Yet there is an interest in such topics and such a study. Some of us in reality stop at a little town, or even at some real little Cumberley, and we see or pass by pretty often a figure or two, and come home and ask Mrs. Holden, the landlady, for information. That lady gives it with her accustomed loquacity. Each day brings more touches to the picture, and in the end it is impossible not to be interested. So it may be with this sketch of Polly and her father.

Again, does a real life story always wind up trimly and nicely, at a conventional term?—is everything adjusted within a space corresponding to three or two volumes? Rather, is there not a perverse tendency to obstruction—

a kind of hindrance to all arrangement?—and do not matters more frequently drag on in an unsettled, unsatisfactory way for many, many years? Some one will not die, some one will live. So it might have been with Polly, who was prepared to accept whatever lot Heaven sent her, and make the most and best of it.

But in course of time—in about two years—the unhappy officer died; which as friends remarked, using the old useful and conventional phrase, “was a happy release.” His sufferings were indeed cruel, from that dreadful wound; but Polly did her duty by him to the end, smoothing his pillow, and comforting him in every way. And as his sight faded, his last glimpse of earth was a gentle face, and a white-robed angel beside him.

Four or five years later we have a view of Cumberley, with its green as rich as ever, and its grand Viaduct—which people are taken to see—finished. Alas! that there should be the same Vicar of Cumberley—a cold, busy, bilious, and distempered man; who sits in his study all day writing letters; now grown to be the very plague of bishops and deans; and who gives out in the village, to anyone who will listen to him, that “he has been ungratefully treated by his daughter!”

Only conceive that!—the daughter the gentle Polly, with whom he stays six months in the year, and might stay twelve. “They will do nothing for me, Sir,” he complains, “and they have a fine fortune—I who have done so much for her!”

They had striven and were always striving—Polly and her husband, Harry Burgess. But what could they do?

The bishops declined him *en masse*. His marriage with the widow he had broken off himself, on what he fancied was another gorgeous break in the clouds of preferment.

Polly would have had him with her always; indeed, has much compunction about the thought of that marriage, which we may doubt she would have ever entered on had he not even urged her to it; but she stipulated, in her settlements almost, for that six months;—is always sending him “things,” and wearies her gentle head with little ambuscades which she plans for their unwary bishop to drop into. Shé may succeed one of these days: for such affection must move mountains, and even win over bishops.

THE END.



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